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Control and Resistance

An exploration of contemporary French writing and film on the effects of globalisation in the workplace

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Control and Resistance

**An exploration of contemporary French writing
and film on the effects of globalisation in the
workplace**

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Abstract

This thesis examines cultural production focusing on the workplace. It explores the representations of changes that have taken place over the last four decades against the backdrop of globalisation at the end of the post-war economic boom. By assessing the mechanisms of control in terms of pedagogy and political reappropriation, it looks at the way writers and film-makers have scrutinised the emergence of a globalised France in which the working classes are less inclined to confront capital.

Its key argument is that the *raison d'être* of these contemporary 'whistleblowers', as they shall be referred to throughout this work, is to give visibility and purpose to the voices of workers and employees who, despite deunionisation and the subsequent crisis of representation and transmission, manage to resist in a socio-economic era disconnected from previous socio-historical landmarks such as the predominantly Marxist grand narrative. It argues that the films and writings analysed share the same purpose, which is to examine the human cost resulting from insidious forms of control and to highlight strategies of atomised yet inspiring deeds of resistance.

This thesis has two focal points. Firstly, it outlines the transformations that have occurred: job losses, casualization and outsourcing, intensification of inequality, just-in-time production, neo-managerialism and bullying. Secondly, it examines how the subject of the workplace is developed in film and literature with an emphasis on character exploration.

It comprises four chapters. Chapter One assesses the mechanisms of control of managerialism induced by neo-liberalism and concentrates on their consequences in the workplace and on the workers. The subsequent three chapters look at the way film-makers and authors tackle the same mechanisms through documentaries, cinema and literature in terms of social significance.

Acknowledgements

The most important acknowledgement for this thesis would be aimed at the numerous writers and film-makers who have inspired and shaped this project all along. Thanks to their inestimable writings and films, their alternative voices, I was able to explore at length the effects of globalisation in the workplace and to demonstrate that those effects are not only overlooked but also have nothing to do with deterministic and natural phenomena beyond our control. They are instead grounded in a social and political reality that has to be exposed and challenged by all means.

I am particularly grateful to my supervisors, Jo Malt and Jim Wolfreys, who have shown unconditional patience and given me sharp guidance throughout this long process. I also want to take this opportunity to warmly thank all my friends and colleagues from various institutes and other walks of life, especially Mara Benetti, Charmian Brinson, Aude de Caunes, Catherine Chapouton, Paul Chauncy, Marion Dufour, Patrick Ffrench, Iria González-Becerra, Claude Hamon, George Keilbach, Stathis Kouvelakis, K-Reine Kruse, Gudrun Lawlor, Monica Lebron, Sheila Lecoeur, Sibylle Moulin, Mary Naughton, Anna Nyburg, Felicity Page, Susan Peneycad, Sandi Pescod, Katell Pinchon, Françoise Pinhède, Laurence Pons-Wood, Serge Radiguet, Odile Rimbart, Anne-Françoise Robert, Bernadette and Marino Sanchez, Soizick Solman, Claire Stapley, Roderick Swanston, Alison Tucker and Stephen Wood, who all have in many and different ways given me their time, advice and continuous encouragement and with some of whom I shared engaging dialogues at every step of the process. My gratitude also goes to the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication at Imperial College for its financial contribution without which this thesis would have never seen the light of day. My warmest thanks also go to my friend Rosie Kemp for her invaluable input regarding language issues and to my husband Dominique Sanchez for his total support from day one.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my father who passed away a few months prior to the completion of this project. His personal experiences as a railway worker and a CGT union member in the 1960s and the 1970s, especially those during the May 68 movement of which I have kept a clear memory as a child, have had an unquantifiable influence on the motivation of this work.

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Introduction

Imagine if the people of Soviet Union have never heard of Communism. The ideology that dominates our lives has, for most of us, no name. Mention it in a conversation and you'll be rewarded with a shrug. Even if your listeners have heard the term before, they will struggle to define it. Neo-liberalism: do you know what it is? Its anonymity is both a symptom and a cause of its power. (Monbiot, G. (2015) 'Neo-liberalism – the ideology at the root of our problems', *The Guardian*, 15 April).

June 2009: an article published in the French national press about a baccalauréat topic for the terminales SGT (*sciences et technologies de la gestion*) started a media-generated controversy as candidates were asked to put themselves in consultants' shoes and give advice to an employer on the best way to fire an employee who had not met the required targets in terms of sales. Amongst the examination questions, candidates had to provide an answer to the following: 'Formulez le raisonnement juridique qui devra conduire l'employeur si l'affaire devait être portée devant le tribunal.'¹

March 2010: the HR Department of Renault were determined to end the wave of suicides that had occurred at the technocentre de Guyancourt where another employee had killed themselves the same month.² In April of the same year, it was the turn of a manager who left the following brief note to her family: 'Je ne suis plus assez forte. Trop de pression au travail.'³

July 2011: employees of an Auchan Drive situated in the Yvelines Department anonymously testified about their appalling working conditions and the consequent repercussions on their health. According to a female worker, 'Entre 6 heures et 8 heures, nous devons enregistrer 350 articles. Les clients récupèrent leurs premiers cabas à 8h30, et il faut que tout soit prêt. Celui qui ne parvient pas à réaliser ces 350 tâches est puni: il se retrouve toute la matinée au frigo, par -20°C, pour les commandes de frais. J'y ai déjà passé un mois.'⁴

¹ Piquemal, M. (2009) 'Bac: le sujet qui dérange', *Libération* [online] 25 June. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2009/06/25/bac-le-sujet-qui-derange_566912 [Accessed 08 July 2009].

² Barthes, E. (2009) 'Comment Renault a fait face aux suicides au technocentre de Guyancourt', *Le Monde* [online] 15 September. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2009/09/15/comment-renault-a-fait-face-aux-suicides-au-technocentre-de-guyancourt_1240510_3224.html [Accessed 28 October 2009].

³ Guéraud, A. (2007) 'Je ne suis plus assez forte, trop de pression au travail', *Libération* [online] 04 April. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2007/04/04/je-ne-suis-plus-assez-forte-trop-de-pression-au-travail_89403 [Accessed 28 October 2009].

⁴ *Le Parisien* (2011) 'Les salariés d'Auchan Drive à bout de souffle', *Le Parisien* [online] 08 July. Available from: <http://www.leparisien.fr/buc-78530/les-salaries-d-auchan-drive-a-bout-de-souffle-08-07-2011-1524657.php> [Accessed 12 June 2015].

September 2011: at Continental Automotive in Toulouse, the management asked the staff to vote for an 8% decrease in their wages in return for the guarantee that their jobs would be secured until 2015. Even though the main unions (CGT and CFDT)⁵ requested their members to boycott the ballot, 83% of the 2500 staff went ahead, with a slim yet clear majority (52%) agreeing with the proposal. Continental Automotive is not an isolated case; other senior management teams use the same strategy of blackmailing, offering the workforce the choice of allowing their work to be outsourced abroad, which would be followed by redundancies, or accepting the curtailment of social advantages such as legal days off, as revealed in *Marianne* magazine.⁶

If, at first sight, these events and situations don't seem to be connected, one should take a closer look. Among so many others, they are representative of an overarching logic of the markets. As Guy Debord would observe: 'C'est partout le même projet d'une restructuration sans communauté.'⁷ There are no alternatives to the economic system represented by global capitalism and work is no longer a vector of social integration. Thus, globalisation has changed economics, politics and society and has facilitated a neo-managerial reinforcement through a process of panoptic individualisation.⁸ The more the company goes global, the more the worker's solitude increases. As Danièle Linhart remarks:

D'autant plus que le monde du travail a subi les assauts, depuis les années 1980, d'une politique managériale d'individualisation systématique de la gestion des salariés à la suite des grèves de Mai 68. Les collectifs de travailleurs qui entretenaient des valeurs de solidarité, d'entraide et le sentiment d'un destin commun partagé ont été déstabilisés et affaiblis par cette politique. Et le travail est progressivement devenu une épreuve solitaire, où chacun est mis en concurrence avec les autres, où chacun se persuade qu'il doit négocier tout seul sa place dans l'entreprise, c'est-à-dire tirer son épingle du jeu et défendre tout seul ses intérêts.⁹

⁵ *Confédération générale du travail* and *Confédération française démocratique du travail*.

⁶ *Marianne* (2010) 'Le chantage à la déloc, nouvelle gestion des hommes', *Marianne* [online] 24 July. Available from: <http://barretoi.canalblog.com/archives/2010/07/24/18655802.html> [Accessed 27 September 2011].

⁷ Debord, G. (1992) *La Société du spectacle*, thèse 192 (Paris: Editions Gallimard), p. 187.

⁸ We shall agree on the following definition of globalisation proposed by Jean-Pierre Durand: 'La mondialisation désigne la période de l'après-fordisme au cours de laquelle se démultiplient les dérégulations commerciales et surtout financières à travers lesquelles le capital déborde définitivement l'Etat-nation pour tenter de résoudre à l'extérieur les contradictions qu'il ne peut surmonter dans l'espace national.' (In Durand, J-P. (2004) *La chaîne invisible, Travailler aujourd'hui: flux tendu et servitude volontaire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 356).

⁹ Linhart, D. (2016) 'Loi travail: « D'où vient cette force qui pousse des salariés à faire grève dans la durée ? »', *Le Monde* [online] 26 May. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2016/05/26/au-dela-de-la-seule-loi-el-khomri-une-vraie-volonte-de-changement_4926549_3232.html [Accessed 27 May 2016].

So, is class struggle a thing of the past and a lost cause? Have the labouring classes been progressively eradicated or at best subjected to a multiple process of atomisation and folklorisation since the end of the 1970s?¹⁰ The ruling classes have had the last word and crushed the workers' long history of struggle. One might even consider that it has mutated into a globalised and opaque neo-liberal agency whose goal is to serve the few by operating a tight and panoptic control on the workforce and ideas. Whilst the dominant ideology is overexposed in the mainstream media, social disputes are systematically caricatured and vilified. Certainly more atomised and denigrated than ever, they may not be circumscribed any more in a grand ideological framework but their frequency keeps unfolding albeit with eclectic outcomes. Yet has the die been cast? As we hope to demonstrate in this thesis, the Colossus' irreversibility is precisely what this work examines, illustrates and most of all attempts to rebut or to at least nuance. The crux of the matter therefore is to examine the representations of power that shape the relationship between the workers and the employers mainly through sociology in Chapter One and cultural production in the other three.

Contemporary 'whistleblowers' such as Paul Ariès, Nicole Aubert, Christophe Dejours, Jacques Généreux, Eric Hazan, Jean-Pierre Le Goff, Danièle Linhart and Michela Marzano have fed the debate on the effects of globalisation in the workplace in the wake of Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski's *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* wherein the evolution of the management discourse from the 1960s to the 1990s is extensively analysed.¹¹ All have had a significant impact in comprehensively bringing to light the corrosive effects of global market deregulation in France. The need to expose the shortcomings of today's workplace is not however limited to the field of sociology and economy insofar as cultural production also plays a significant part. Novelists and film-makers have entered, enriched and nourished the debate from a critical perspective. Workplaces are now being re-investigated through documentaries, films and publications.

This thesis could have taken different directions. It is neither about the history of cultural theory nor about neo-liberalism and globalisation per se. Thus, to posit an absolute theoretical judgement by developing a more formal aesthetic would have

¹⁰ The end of the 1970s coincides with that of the post-war economic expansion.

¹¹ Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme, Le discours du management des années 90* (Paris: Editions Gallimard), pp. 93-153.

prematurely closed the debate. Given that the transitional processes of the social and political transformations which are redefining the workplace are still in the making, there should be a cut-off point. The aim of Chapter One is precisely to take stock of the current social and political context in order to make the subsequent chapters possible. Hence, at an early stage, it became a necessity to focus on the ‘petites misères’, an expression coined by Pierre Bourdieu in *La Misère du monde*,¹² through the exploration of literature and film by using the elements tackled in Chapter One as a referential framework. My principal focus is therefore to explore the social consequences of neo-liberalism through their ripples. It is also about highlighting that this atomised suffering is embedded in a broader social reality defined by an institutionalised system of exploitation that is also internalised by the workers. As this thesis is about the intersection between culture and sociology, I have attempted to make links and contribute to a more general understanding of processes throughout, that is to say a form of parametrism in which method is suited to object. Providing a disseminated analysis based on ‘minor’ human tragedies that may trigger ‘minor’ acts of resistance through film and literature allowed me to establish theoretical perspectives between authors that have rarely, if ever, been looked out in a comparative setting, e.g. Pierre Bourdieu and Marie-France Hirigoyen, Vincent de Gaulejac and Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson and Christophe Dejours, Jean-Pierre Le Goff and Kevin Doogan in Chapter One. These perspectives are also broadened by putting film-makers and novelists together with sociologists in the subsequent chapters. This allows for a dynamic interaction between the different art forms in question and relevant aspects of critical thought.

Chapter One of this thesis aims to explore to what extent the reforms conveyed at the heart of the workplace have weakened old solidarities whilst increasing insecurity through insidious or/and drastic changes in work organisation. Mechanisms of control are tested through the prism of precarity and insecurity, neo-managerialism,¹³ specific jargon and dominant narratives are analysed along with an assessment of workplace bullying in the French context as a major symptomatic effect of the transformations. Given that writers and film directors have re-opened the doors of offices and factories in order to investigate and assess the state we’re in, the following chapters outline a

¹² Bourdieu, P. (1993) *La Misère du monde* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

¹³ See Enteman, W F. (1993) *Managerialism: The Emergence of a New Ideology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, Paperback).

steady revitalisation process in terms of struggle confronted with new socio-economical parameters and the emergence of old and new forms of resistance that keep surfacing through cultural production. In this respect, Chapter Two explores key documentary films that offer an analytical perspective on control and ‘little’ suffering through revealing case studies whilst engaging the spectator with powerful alternatives. Chapter Three proposes an examination of the thematics and storylines of fiction films focusing on how the praxis of work makes or breaks individuals and communities. Finally, Chapter Four comprises both fictional and semi-biographical writings that provide a critical overview of workplaces, leadership and resistance with a clear emphasis on characterisation and narrative.

If the undeniable success of cinema and literature only has an informative and reflective impact, if any, it nonetheless offers new insights into class struggle and political awareness. All the films and literary works that we have chosen to examine have one common feature, which is to voice the injustices that cripple today’s workplace; a common achievement that has emerged outside the framing of any apparent collective project. This is a matter that will be debated and analysed throughout this thesis which explores current social mutations and deteriorations. From slick offices to assembly lines and illegal workshops, workplaces are back on the map.

In this chapter we look in more detail at a whole range of empirical processes of control that have been implemented in the workplace. We assess how neo-managerialism, which is at the forefront of neo-liberalism, operates through passive-aggressive strategies disseminated by a slippery language utilised as an ideological vehicle that appears to be valid for the entire workforce.¹ We also examine how fear and suffering have been enforced by the use of bullying in the aftermath of the disintegration of workers' collectives and how France's reluctant adoption of Toyotist concepts makes its manifestations specific to the French workplace.

Chapter One

New patterns of control in the workplace

1. Creating insecurity
 2. Control and discipline
-

1. Creating insecurity

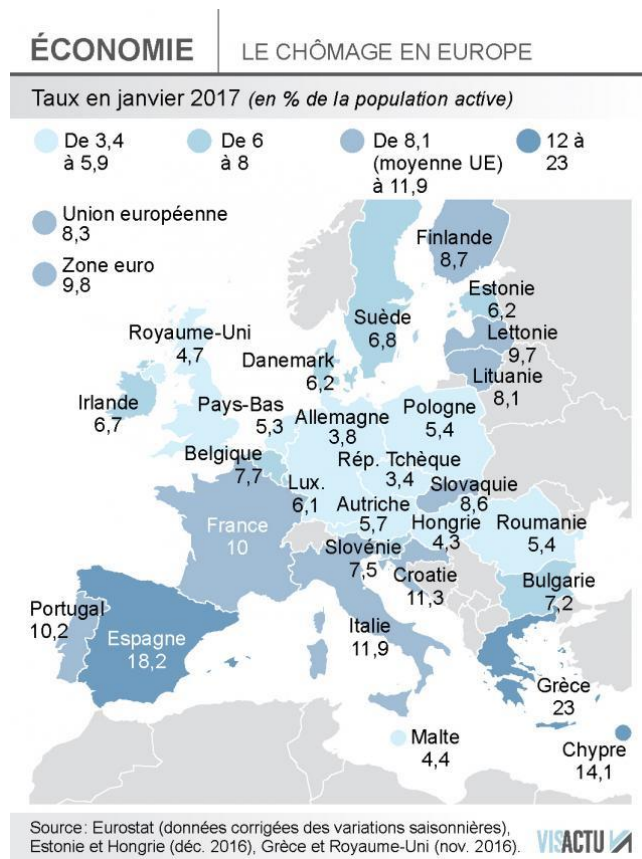
Porter à la conscience des mécanismes qui rendent la vie douloureuse, voire invivable, ce n'est pas les neutraliser; porter au jour les contradictions, ce n'est pas les résoudre. Mais, pour si sceptique que l'on puisse être sur l'efficacité du message sociologique, on ne peut tenir pour nul l'effet qu'il peut exercer en permettant à ceux qui souffrent de découvrir la possibilité d'imputer leur souffrance à des causes sociales et de se sentir ainsi disculpés; en faisant connaître largement l'origine sociale, collectivement occultée, du malheur sous toutes ses formes, y compris les plus intimes et les plus secrètes. [...] Constat qui, malgré les apparences, n'a rien de désespérant: ce que le monde social a fait, le monde social peut, armé de ce savoir, le défaire. (Bourdieu, P. (1993) *La Misère du monde*, p. 944).

The workplace is the principal environment where class struggle keeps occurring despite the overall representation of a pacified post-industrialised society. However, the decline of manufacturing and the growth of the service sector have fed the perception that class is a thing of the past. By the same token, industrial defeats inflicted on the labour movement over the past four decades have also served to legitimate such an impression. As a matter of fact, even though 'moving to more complex, multidimensional models of class does not imply that classes are dying',² a rather effective ideological deception is to present our contemporary society as socially homogenous, thus linking the emergence of social unrest with a danger to the

¹ If capitalism is defined as an economic and social system and neo-liberalism a set of economic policies, their imbrication is hardly challenged.

² See Hoot, M., Brooks, C. & Manza, J. (1993) '*The Persistence of Classes in Post-Industrial Society*', International Sociology, vol. 8, n° 3, cited in 'France in revolt' by Wolfreys, J. (2006).

stability of the whole ensemble. It is not about conflicts opposing the exploited against the exploiters but the ‘good and silent majority of hard-working apolitical’ consumers against the ‘bad and lazy’ underclass.³ The reality of job degradation is therefore presented by the management as the least bad option: a protection against unemployment. In contrast, slumping wages, falling social mobility and general pessimism have dominated the post-economic boom period. As Chris Bickerton also observes in the *New York Times*, any substantial fall in the unemployment rate is the consequence of labour market deregulation and comes with a social cost, that of the emergence of new inequalities. This has been the case in countries like Germany and Great Britain.⁴



Source: Eurostat (2017) ‘Le chômage en Europe’, [online] January. Available on https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=taux+de+chomage+en+europe&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiT58_Y0ZfWAhUpCcAKHcXcCBwQ_AUICygC&biw=1366&bih=673#imgsrc=XaU7Zp03M8DJNM:&spf=150494421a280

³ See Jones, O. (2012) *Chavs, The Demonization of the British Working Class* (London: Verso).

⁴ Bickerton, C. (2017) ‘Emmanuel Macron Will Be Yet Another Failed French President’, *New York Times* [online] 07 September. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/opinion/emmanuel-macron-popularity.html> [Accessed 09 September 2017].

In France, between 2009 and 2011 alone, 900 factories closed down and 100,000 jobs disappeared in the industrial sector, to which should be added 30,000 job losses in the automobile sector.⁵ Regardless of the fact that the working class still represents one quarter of the workforce,⁶ the transformations under global capitalism have jeopardised all the systems of value, transmission and tradition attached to them, a phenomenon that is poignantly addressed in François Bon's publication *Daewoo* explored in Section Four of Chapter Four.⁷

Trade unionism in decline

Since the reconstruction period, the professional sphere has been clearly split between private and public sectors, the latter being associated with security and stability, whilst embodying the republican pact and prominent unionization although privatization has crept into the public sector and union density has fallen.⁸ The decline of trade unionism has blurred even more the reality of class division. Given that only 11% of French workers are union members, which represents 2.6 million individuals out of a total of 23 million,⁹ the increasing number of elements forming the 'reserve army' goes along with disaffection regarding the protection of basic rights. A sense of diffused insecurity prevails. With supporting evidence, Michel Lallement writes: 'La France ne brille pas par un taux de syndicalisme salarié particulièrement élevé. Il demeure même [...] parmi les plus faibles des pays de l'OCDE. [...] pour être plus précis, en 2008, la CFDT revendique un peu moins de 810,000 adhérents, FO 800, 000, la CGT 710,000, etc.'¹⁰ Despite their established position in the French social and political landscape, limiting the damage caused by the transformations attributed to globalisation and their costly consequences in workplaces is all the workers' organisations have been able to achieve, if anything at all, according to Vincent de

⁵ *Le Figaro* (2011) 'La France a perdu près de 900 usines en trois ans', *Le Figaro* [online] 28 December. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2011/12/28/04016-20111228ARTFIG00244-la-france-a-perdu-pres-de-900-usines-en-trois-ans.php> [Accessed 31 December 2011].

⁶ Durand, J-P. (2004) *La chaîne invisible, Travailler aujourd'hui: flux tendu et servitude volontaire*, op. cit., p. 133.

⁷ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo* (Paris: Editions Le Livre de Poche).

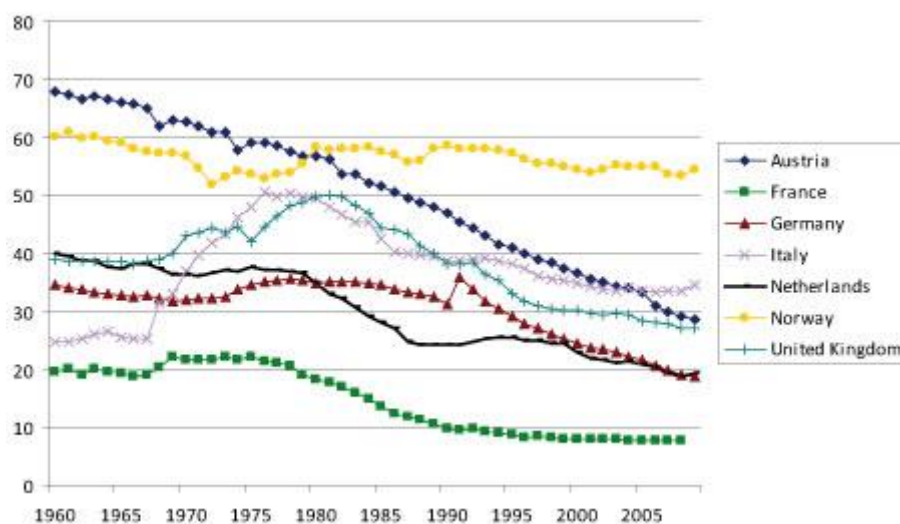
⁸ The following article sets the record straight in terms of union membership figures. (Morice, L. (2016) 'Non, il n'y a pas 8% de syndiqués en France', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 02 June.) Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/reforme-code-travail-el-khomri/20160601.OBS1706/non-il-n-y-a-pas-8-de-syndiques-en-france.html> [Accessed 02 June 2016].

⁹ Chanut, J-C. (2016) 'Le taux de syndicalisation se maintient à 11% en France', *La Tribune* [online] 17 May. Available from: <http://www.latribune.fr/economie/france/le-taux-de-syndicalisation-se-maintient-a-11-en-france-571857.html> [Accessed 20 May 2016].

¹⁰ Lallement, M. (2010) *Le Travail sous tension* (Paris: Editions Sciences Humaines), p. 75.

Gaulejac. He writes: 'La crédibilité et le pouvoir des syndicats sont inversement proportionnels à la globalisation des entreprises. Plus celles-ci deviennent "multinationales", plus ceux-là perdent de leur pouvoir critique. L'action syndicale tend à se réduire à une représentation formelle, fondée sur des règles légales plutôt que sur des luttes collectives.'¹¹ In *In the Name of Social Democracy, The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present*, Gerassimos Moschonas identifies another key factor for their loss of membership and relative shift in power. This is linked to the electoral crisis across the parties of the left in Europe, which has had a negative impact on work organisations. He states that a process of 'de-social-democratisation' has increased their decline.¹² He warns that ignoring working-class demands, a phenomenon amplified by the absence of any strong organisation capable of channelling these demands, can represent a 'time bomb ticking away under the foundations of the impressive edifice of contemporary social democracy'.¹³ Today's rise of populist movements across advanced countries has validated his claim. The impoverished working classes consider themselves let down in terms of representation.

Evolution des taux de syndicalisation: les autres pays européens¹⁴



¹¹ De Gaulejac, V. (2009) *La société malade de la gestion* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 52.

¹² Moschonas, G. (2002) *In the Name of Social Democracy, The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present* (London: Verso).

¹³ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁴ In Jaoul-Grammare, M. & Terraz, I. (2012) 'Diversité et évolution de la syndicalisation en Europe', *L'Observatoire des politiques économiques en Europe* n° 26 [online] Summer Edition. Available from: <http://opee.u-strasbg.fr/spip.php?article262> [Accessed 02 July 2012].

Moreover, in *Le Livre noir des syndicats*, journalistic whistleblowers Erwan Seznec and Rozenn Le Saint reveal the endemic corruption at the core of organisations (CGT, CFTC, CFDT and FO) marred by opaque funding.¹⁵ Both writers also express a severe judgment on the unions by observing an ideological shift within organisations that mimic and work too closely with HR departments with which they share the same practice of management. Their increasing expertise of the culture of enterprise may bring them closer to management with which a sense of proximity gradually emerges, whilst cutting them from their base and the ordinary worker.¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Le Goff encapsulates the phenomenon by stating: ‘La crise du militantisme n’épargne pas les syndicats qui oscillent souvent entre le repli sur des intérêts étroitement corporatistes et la fuite en avant moderniste.’¹⁷ As the quotation highlights, such a separation between the leadership and the militant base is problematic. A subsequent schism has materialised between the militant and professional camps, which may put strain on the coherence of the organisation’s mission when a social movement breaks out.

Thus, unions are perceived to be playing into the hands of the categories they are supposed to stand up against, if such a perception is partly instrumentalised by the governing class itself.¹⁸ Moreover, it is at times difficult to differentiate the role of unions and of *les conseils de prud’hommes* (industrial tribunals since 1806) insofar as work-related issues are more and more addressed as individual cases by the former. In general, unions provide the administrative/judicial support to the plaintiff who decides to refer their case to *les prud’hommes* in order to obtain compensation, etc, as we shall see through specific disputes in some of the documentaries explored in Section Three of Chapter Two. Yet these organisations’ influence goes beyond their membership insofar as they are still directly involved with crucial decisions such as fixing the rate and duration of benefits with *Pôle Emploi* agency. Furthermore, the existence of *comités d’entreprise* (works councils) playing a significant role and

¹⁵ Seznec, E. & Le Saint, R. (2016) *Le Livre noir des syndicats* (Paris: Robert Laffont).

¹⁶ Seznec, E. (2016) ‘Les syndicats n’ont plus besoin des adhérents pour vivre!’, *Le Télégramme* [online] 28 May. Available from: <http://www.letelegramme.fr/bretagne/erwan-seznec-les-syndicats-n-ont-plus-besoin-des-adherents-pour-vivre-28-05-2016-11084677.php> [Accessed 14 June 2017].

¹⁷ Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), p. 95.

¹⁸ For instance, the role of the unions during the social movement against pension reform in October 2010 was condemned by some militants. Instead of rejecting the extension of the retirement age voted by the Fillon government, the unions had from the start ‘opened negotiations’ with the latter. (*Semaine Agitées*, 2010) ‘Mouvement contre la réforme des retraites’ [online] October. Available from: <http://www.atelierdecreationlibertaire.com/semainesagitees/Les-directions-syndicales.html> [Accessed 16 May 2016].

financed by the employer has been compulsory in companies with over 50 employees since a law voted in 1945.¹⁹ Thus, unions have perhaps no alternative but to adjust to what is perceived as an ever-changing social context whose elusive rules are corroborated by an even more slippery dominant discourse, a matter that will be analysed in Section Two of this Chapter.²⁰

The breaking of solidarities post-May 68

Christophe Dejours in *Travail, usure mentale* observes that in automobile factories in the outskirts of Paris the management makes sure that each worker on the same production line has a different mother tongue – combined with a poor level of French – and therefore finds it even more difficult to communicate during their shift.²¹ In factories, the constant noise produced by machines represents an obstacle in any attempt of using speech leaving each individual alone with their repetitive tasks whilst having to wear earplugs, like the workers in Philippe Le Guay's film *Trois Huit* (2001) explored in Section One of Chapter Three.²² However the similarities are quite striking when it comes to offices, and particularly those that are open plan, where the omnipresence of electronic noises and voices has exactly the same function, which is to muzzle communication. Given that the separation between the private and the public is abolished, a normalisation of behaviours comes into effect. Employees are likely to refrain from voicing their grievances for fear of being singled out.²³ Danièle Linhart goes even further by claiming that open space offices are precisely designed to maintain employees in a relative but permanent state of destabilisation by management. A panoptic pressure incites the former to comply with the rules in a space defined by 'visible competition'.²⁴ As for the strategic use of premises, when a group of workers has to move into a new workshop which enforces stricter regulation, what used to define resistance in the former workplace turns obsolete with 'la

¹⁹ Etiévent, M. (2015) 'De février 1945 à mai 1946, la longue naissance des comités d'entreprise', *L'Humanité* [online] 13 February. Available from: <http://www.economist.com/node/6855885> [Accessed 31 August 2016].

²⁰ Guillaume, C. & Pochic, S. (2009) 'La professionnalisation de l'activité syndicale: talon d'Achille de la politique de syndicalisation à la CFDT?', *Politix* n° 85 [online] January Edition. Available from: <http://www.cairn.info/revue-politix-2009-1-p-31.htm> [Accessed 02 September 2014].

²¹ Dejours, C. (2000) *Travail: usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 108.

²² *Trois Huit* (2001) Directed by Philippe Le Guay [film]. France: Velvet Films.

²³ Des Isnards, A. & Zuber, T. (2008) *L'Open space m'a tuer* (Paris: Hachette).

²⁴ Chemin, A. (2012) 'Dans la cage de l'open space', *Le Monde* [online] 28 October. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2012/10/18/dans-la-cage-de-l-open-space_1777656_3246.html [Accessed 25 September 2014].

disparition d'un espace qui fonctionnait comme un support de l'action collective.' The post-May 68 workplace is that of 'l'ouvrier indifférencié'. In the new premises, there are designated spaces where workers are only allowed to talk and eat in the presence of their team leader.²⁵ (In some cases, music is continuously streamed throughout the workshops as a means to 'improve' working conditions.)

Such *Verschlimmbesserung*²⁶ is not met with unanimous approval, especially from the elder generation. Thus, an enduring sense of belonging to a professional category guaranteed the transmission of *savoir-faire* from the elder to the young. New premises, new work methods, new objectives of productions and new products are lauded whilst existing solidarities and established and shared expertise are implicitly swept aside. Yet, by both ideological and linguistic sleight of hand, one jeopardises a whole history of practice, traditions, system of values on which workers have built the identity of their collectives. As Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux observe:

Le déménagement d'un atelier vers un atelier modernisé est une forme de délocalisation qui ne dit pas son nom. [...] Ce transfert est l'occasion d'une "reconversion" menée par la hiérarchie et qui prend alors un tour violent, dans la déqualification des anciennes manières d'être ouvrières. La dévalorisation symbolique des OS aboutit finalement à la constitution d'une figure, celle du "vieux OS", vieux paysan, vieux immigré "inconvertible" rédhitoirement enfermé dans ses habitudes et qu'on doit renoncer à transformer.²⁷

Workplaces abound with official and unofficial conversations, rumours, gossip, constructive and negative criticism, advice and levels of confidentiality; an eclectic range of entangled conversations and speeches that, put together, are bound to reveal the inner workings of the company. For instance, should it be acceptable to openly discuss and compare wages between fellow-workers as used to be the case? In point of fact, the elder members of the working class in France are keener to reveal their wages with their co-workers out of solidarity whereas the young, deprived of any militancy culture, are more reluctant to do so, as is described in Beaud and Pialoux's *Retour sur la condition ouvrière*.²⁸ Hence, even though one has a long way to go between having small talks, sharing concerns and proceeding to strike, companies' managements are determined to miss nothing in order to assert their authority, 'la chasse aux temps morts s'intensifie'.²⁹

²⁵ Beaud, S. & Pialoux, M. (1999) *Retour sur la condition ouvrière, Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard* (Paris: Editions Fayard), p. 72.

²⁶ Improvement for the worse (translated from German).

²⁷ Beaud, S. & Pialoux, M. (1999) *Retour sur la condition ouvrière, Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard*, op. cit., p. 101.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 314-315.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

In *Les managers de l'âme*, psycho-sociologist Valérie Brunel analyses how the methods derived from the American counter-culture of individualism and self-fulfilment of the late 1970s and breaking from Taylorist³⁰ practice have been recycled by today's management teams.³¹ Behind the ambivalent notion of personal development in which employees have to participate and with which they have to comply on a regular basis through appraisals, goal-setting and skill-enhancement, there is an ideology of adaptation whose primary goal is evidently to serve the interests of the employer, preferably in a deconflictualised environment. A culture of pressure is diffused with personalised workloads, fragmented timesheets and appraisals delivered with a specific vocabulary that supposedly give the working individual a sense of autonomy and even progression as we shall explore in the next section. It goes along with an increasing expectation from 'above', and from 'within', to deliver the best productivity in lesser time whilst absorbing in its process any potential conflictual situation. This so-called autonomy accentuates the eroded solidarity that was once the norm.³² Participative alienation is therefore branded as a unique opportunity which brings instant reward and in theory secures an enviable place in the company, under the guise of being perceived as ideologically free and ethical. To give a striking example, according to *Agenda Social*, a quarterly magazine published by the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, employees and workers who are subjected to restructurings should be able to present their experience as an asset in terms of employability in the long run; a mind-set that employers and institutions would expect to be internalised by a majority of the workers, especially those in the service industry. The magazine's special feature about restructurings emphasises the positive impact of their occurrences:

Aujourd'hui, aucun secteur économique n'est épargné par les effets permanents du changement économique. Tous sont affectés par divers chocs qui peuvent être cycliques, structurels ou liés à la mondialisation et ont un impact sur l'organisation des entreprises, ainsi que sur la structure du marché du travail. [...] Le principe de base, c'est qu'il est impossible de gérer le changement économique en conservant les anciennes pratiques. [...] Ce document a pour but de soutenir la

³⁰ Taylorism is a system of scientific management invented by American mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915). In his view, the role of factory management was to determine the best way for assembly-line workers to maximize their jobs, thus providing training as well as appropriate devices and tools. It was also in charge of singling out and rewarding workers who performed well by offering incentives. With a stopwatch used to time each worker, Taylor's methodology consisted of breaking each professional activity down into its individual motions in order to select the ones that were essential for maximizing productivity.

³¹ Brunel, V. (2004) *Les managers de l'âme* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), pp. 139-142.

³² Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire*, op. cit., p. 59.

lutte contre les attitudes passives et la résistance et de généraliser une culture proactive de l'anticipation du changement. Il se concentre sur les exemples les plus modernes, les plus innovants et les plus dynamiques liés à l'anticipation, à la préparation et à la gestion des processus de restructuration.³³

In theory, the employees are expected to be able to constantly renew their skills, re-adapt from scratch, strictly conform to the directives and cope with the paradox of being considered indispensable and disposable at the same time, at the mercy of the whims of the markets. Therefore, this culture of pressure is indeed one of the oppressive factors that determine the employees' attitudes leading to apathy and suffering (see Section Two). It is instrumentalised by the governing class and internalised to a degree by the workforce insofar as the third and fourth ages of capitalism are characterised by reducing the world of work to the economic and financial sphere in which dedication and obedience are branded as the opposite of alienation, as well as the latest expressions of emancipation.³⁴ Michela Marzano points out: 'On demande aux gens de s'impliquer, de participer, de donner des idées, d'être réactifs, mais on leur demande en même temps d'intégrer les contraintes de l'entreprise.'³⁵ The global company presents itself as a safe haven, which protects and stimulates its workforce, but like most other organised powers, it only protects its financial assets.

The human cost of precarity

By destroying working-class solidarities and tampering with job roles, the transformative process has had tragic consequences such as the increasing rate of suicide at CAC 40 company France Télécom.³⁶ Between 2006 and 2008, 22,000 jobs

³³ *Agenda Social* (2011) 'S'adapter au changement – la restructuration dans l'optique de l'UE', (Anticiper le changement, p. 16.) *Agenda Social* n° 27 [online] July. Available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6872&langId=fr> [Accessed 30 July 2011].

³⁴ As defined by sociologists Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Jacques G  n  reux among others, capitalism can be separated into four phases (or epochs) between which systemic crises have occurred. The first epoch dominates the 19th century and corresponds to the patrimonial hegemony of the *bourgeoisie*. Emerging at the beginning of the 1930s following the Great Depression, the second epoch is based on the Fordist compromise and the relative social stability associated with it. The third phase takes shape at the end of the post-war boom, triggered by the oil crises of the 1970s. It is enforced by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's right-wing policies inspired by The Chicago School of Economics led by economists Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. Finally, the fourth epoch is characterised by the global supremacy of the financial sphere and global market flexibility, which have been facilitated by the digital revolution of the mid-1990s.

³⁵ Marzano, M. (2008) *Extension du domaine de la manipulation, De l'entreprise    la vie priv  e* (Paris: Editions Grasset), p. 79.

³⁶ Gazzane, H. (2016) 'Suicides    France T  l  com: le rappel des faits', *Le Figaro* [online] 07 July. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/societes/2016/07/07/20005-20160707ARTFIG00115-suicides-a-france-telecom-le-rappel-des-faits.php> [Accessed 20 September 2016].

were cut and 10,000 others had their roles modified. It is considered one of the most drastic restructuring in a Western country. 35 employees committed suicide between 2008 and 2009. CEO Didier Lombard, his deputy and HR director were all prosecuted for bullying, a judicial case which was unprecedented.³⁷ Yet, according to sociologist Gérard Bonnet, such an occurrence has to be measured with great caution. In an interview in *Le Monde*, he backs Insee³⁸ statistician René Padieu and sociologist François Vatin, who ascertain that the rate of suicides in the workplace has not increased, compared to previous sets of statistics:

En effet, 89% des analyses publiées alors, ont considéré qu'il existait une "vague de suicides" chez France Télécom, c'est-à-dire, un taux de suicides significativement supérieur, d'un point de vue statistique, à ce que l'on aurait dû attendre. Or, il s'agit probablement d'un mythe médiatique. [...] Tous ceux qui ont voulu contester ce fait [...] se sont vu opposer des arguments qui tenaient en partie de l'intimidation morale. [...] C'est une erreur très commune qui porte même un nom: l'effet râteau, ainsi nommé parce que notre esprit a tendance à faire passer un "râteau mental" sur les phénomènes et s'attend à ce qu'ils soient répartis équitablement dans le temps.³⁹

Their interpretation started a controversy with bitter exchanges between experts expressing antagonistic viewpoints supported by contradictory figures and percentages within the media. Whether this is a media myth or not, the fact remains that during a period of 5 years, in France, work-related 1000 suicide attempts were reported out of which 47% were fatal.⁴⁰ Moreover, since the last four decades workplace suicide has increased globally by 60% amongst workers aged 15 to 44 according to The World Health Organisation.⁴¹ Such significant figures put a caveat on Padieu and Vatin's analysis. It is an example that encapsulates the fact that the workplace remains a hierarchical environment where ideologies continue to clash through class conflict despite the diminished role of the unions combined with regressive employment practices on behalf of management. Symptomatic of a widespread economic malaise, this issue is tackled in *Sauf le respect que je vous dois*, a film by Fabienne Godet (see Section Three of Chapter Three) and also in Thierry

³⁷ Agence France Presse (2015) 'L'enquête sur les suicides à France Télécom est close', *Libération* [online] 06 January. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/01/06/l-enquete-sur-les-suicides-a-france-telecom-est-close_1174705 [Accessed 30 June 2015].

³⁸ Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques.

³⁹ Bronner, G. (2012) 'France Télécom: vague de suicides et commentaires hâtifs', *Le Monde* [online] 11 July. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/07/11/france-telecom-vague-de-suicides-et-commentaires-hatifs_1731817_3232.html [Accessed 29 March 2014].

⁴⁰ *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré [Documentary Film]. France : Les Films Grain de Sable.

⁴¹ World Health Organisation (2006) 'Preventing suicide: a resource at work', *WHO* [online]. Available from: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/43502/1/9241594381_eng.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2017].

Beinstingel's autobiographical novel *Retour aux mots sauvages* (see Section Four of Chapter Four).⁴²

From a different perspective, restructurings operate through 'economic blackmail' as was the case with German workers at Siemens who were asked to accept decreased wages in order to save their jobs. This was the only way of preventing the work being outsourced to Hungary.⁴³ Workplaces such as call centres are also relocated to emerging countries,⁴⁴ a matter addressed by Christian Salmon in *Storytelling* (2007).⁴⁵ One of the privileged destinations of Western companies remains the Indian market.⁴⁶ Considered unjust and unacceptable, the restructuring of workplaces can affect both the workers' health and homelife and sever essential formal and informal ties that underpin communities.⁴⁷ The main strategy for markets is therefore to target and transform the culture of workplaces for purpose of serving their expansion and financial gains. This practice has been implemented throughout all the sectors of the public services at a steady pace in France since 1986.⁴⁸

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the 'left hand' and 'right hand' of the state in *Acts of Resistance* (1998) perfectly encapsulates the social significance of such a phenomenon.⁴⁹ The 'left hand' includes elements, e.g. education, health and housing, which are linked to past social conflicts within the state. The 'right hand' is conceptualised by all the agents of social control, e.g. the judiciary, the police and the army, ministerial cabinets, private and state banks. According to the sociologist, the objective of neo-liberalism is to empower the 'right hand' at the detriment of the 'left hand', i.e. the steady pace of privatisations of state companies, e.g. Saint-Gobain,

⁴² *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (2005) Directed by Fabienne Godet [Film]. France: Haut et Court Distribution; Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages* (Paris: Editions Fayard).

⁴³ *Syti.net* (2006) 'Délocalisations et mondialisation', *Syti.net* [online] 01 January. Available from: <http://www.syti.net/Delocalisations.html> [Accessed 25 June 2014].

⁴⁴ Galtier, M. (2016) 'Centres d'appels: la Tunisie décroche', *Libération* [online] 14 August. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2016/08/14/centres-d-appels-la-tunisie-decroche_1472393 [Accessed 10 April 2017].

⁴⁵ Salmon, C. (2007) *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), pp. 75-80.

⁴⁶ Beares, M. (2010) 'India', *Clutch* [online] 07 October. Available from: <http://www.sourcingline.com/outsourcing-location/india> [Accessed 26 April 2014].

⁴⁷ Jungerman, N. (2004) 'Entretien avec François Bon. Prix Wepler Fondation La Poste 2004', *Fondation d'entreprise La Poste* [online] 25 November. Available from: <http://www.fondationlaposte.org/florilettre/entretiens/entretien-avec-francois-bon-propos-recueillis-par-nathalie-jungerman/> [Accessed 12 April 2013].

⁴⁸ *Le blog du parti de gauche 79* (2012) 'Il faut préserver le service public "à la française"', *Parti de gauche 79* [online] 29 May. Available from: <http://partidegauche79.over-blog.org/article-il-faut-preserver-le-service-public-a-la-francaise-106031438.html> [Accessed 03 June 2012].

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, P. (1998) *The Left Hand and the Right Hand of the State*, in *Acts of Resistance* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

Péchiney, France Télécom, Thomson CSF, Air France, and cut-backs in the service sector by successive left-wing and right-wing governments that have facilitated the pro-corporate reorganisation of the country since the mid-1980s. Thus, for Zygmunt Bauman, the role of the state has diminished to the point of only protecting the interests and stability of the world's successful globalised niches. Those who are excluded from these niches represent a potential if not a real threat.⁵⁰ This will be explored in numerous films and writings in Chapters Three and Four.

Furthermore MNCs (multinational corporations) play a significant part in shaping the 'right hand' but they also substitute for it when they provide their workforce with education and qualifications. Thus, the validation of a foundation degree in business by McDonald's in 2010 started a precedent in the UK,⁵¹ followed by France a year later:

Mardi, le ministère de l'Education nationale a signé un accord-cadre avec la chaîne de restauration rapide portant sur la validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE) qui permettra aux employés de l'enseigne de transformer leur expérience en diplôme reconnu. Cet accord permettra aux "équipiers" de McDonald's travaillant en caisse ou en cuisine (soit 80% des 63 000 salariés de l'enseigne en France) de sanctionner leur expérience par un CAP, un BTS ou un bac pro. [...] Depuis 2002, la VAE permet d'obtenir un diplôme ou un titre grâce à son expérience professionnelle, acquise dans le cadre d'une activité salariée, non salariée ou bénévole. Une vingtaine d'accords ont déjà été signés avec des entreprises comme la Fnac, GDF-Suez, Danone ou récemment L'Oréal.⁵²

Simply put, the paradox is that the same big companies can train and award employees with accredited vocational qualifications that barely disguise the blatant precarity of statuses whilst making them redundant if required. This economic penetration goes beyond the strict scope of the workplace by revealing the transformations occurring within society as a whole and vice versa, transformations which are amplified with narratives based on what Vincent de Gaulejac identifies as 'une illusion positiviste' on which neo-management depends and by which the workforce is ideologically intimidated and stimulated. The non-unionised workforce is therefore turned into a vast and eclectic category of service providers, which condones the common perception that it has become lighter, immaterial and freed from any class consciousness that 'used to' hamper its productivity. This permanent

⁵⁰ Bauman, Z. (1999) *Le coût humain de la mondialisation* (Paris: Hachette Littératures).

⁵¹ Okyere, E. (2010) 'Mc Donald's puts degree courses on the menu for managers', *BBC* [online] 25 November. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/11834904/mcdonalds-puts-degree-courses-on-the-menu-for-managers> [Accessed 28 November 2010].

⁵² *Libération & Reuters* (2011) 'Les employés de Mc Donald's pourront transformer leur expérience en diplôme', *Libération* [online] 22 March. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2011/03/22/les-employes-de-mcdonald-s-pourront-transformer-leur-experience-en-diplome_723490 [Accessed 20 April 2011].

‘dégraissage’⁵³ which threatens every professional sector – especially the public sector which has a long tradition of labour rights obtained through decades of struggle – is precisely putting in place what Vincent de Gaulejac denounces as a ‘hold-up planétaire’ of the means of production.⁵⁴

Yet how could the workforce with purchasing power become a costly commodity for an ideological requisite that requires costs to be driven down? Apart from companies still functioning with a purely Taylorist system (around 14% of the European market),⁵⁵ the common view that very few jobs escape from being affected by these transformations, especially those from the ordinary worker up to middle-management, is debatable. De Gaulejac’s viewpoint is for instance challenged by Kevin Doogan’s argument that capitalism imperatively needs a stable workforce with ‘long-term employment’ in order to prosper. His argument is that advanced countries’ economies get stronger when jobs are protected with solid employment rights, which is beneficial to society as a whole.⁵⁶ We may argue here that such a stability tends to remain the prerogative of senior, ‘prestigious’ and highly paid positions. Despite the current economic downturn, it is noteworthy that these positions flourish at the same time as the jobs of lower ranking employees are being axed, a trend that has not escaped sociologist Richard Sennett who writes:

La récession a clarifié et aiguisé un phénomène plus caché au cours de la phase d’expansion: quand les choses vont mal, les gens au sommet ont plus de marge de manœuvre et d’adaptation que ceux d’en bas; dans les sociétés en difficulté, le réseau de direction est plus épais et plus riche, permettant à ceux d’en haut de s’en sortir plus facilement.⁵⁷

In that respect, let’s also point out recent controversies regarding the salaries and golden parachutes of French senior managers such as Thierry Morin of Valeo, a car equipment company, who left with a pay package of €3.2 million whilst 1600 employees were made redundant;⁵⁸ Noël Forgeard of EADS, whose departure

⁵³ To adapt an unfortunate but deliberate expression used by former Prime Minister Alain Juppé who referred to the civil servants as ‘mauvaise graisse’ during a debate at the National Assembly in May 1996.

⁵⁴ De Gaulejac, V. (2009) *La société malade de la gestion*, op. cit., p. 54.

⁵⁵ Lallement, M. (2010) *Le Travail sous tension*, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁶ Doogan, K. (2009) *New Capitalism? The Transformation of Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 17.

⁵⁷ Sennett, R. (2006) *La culture du nouveau capitalisme* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel), p. 68.

⁵⁸ *Le Monde & Agence France Presse* (2009) ‘Le parachute doré de du PDG de Valeo fait scandale’, *Le Monde* [online] 24 March. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/la-crise-financiere/article/2009/03/24/le-parachute-dore-de-thierry-morin-fait-scandale_1171805_1101386.html [Accessed 29 August 2010].

following a poor performance as CEO was rewarded with a package of €6 million,⁵⁹ and Daniel Bernard, CEO of Carrefour, who left with €38 million, a sum equivalent to a cashier's salary for 350 years.⁶⁰ As political analyst Paul Ariès concludes: 'Le management moderne, c'est une façon de dire: concurrence à la base et de moins en moins de concurrence au sommet. On inverse complètement ce qui était le modèle de l'économie.'⁶¹ That being so, the gradual loss of social protection that affects an increasing number of professional categories is often presented as an imperative that prevents job losses, which justifies the degradation of work and the generalization of precariousness.⁶² Outlining a balanced approach to the societal consequences of the rise of precarious jobs in European countries requires a clear and common understanding of the definition of flexibility and precarity.⁶³ In truth, the situation between these countries is very contrasting, according to *Le Monde*:

L'institut allemand IAB a mené une étude sur l'emploi dans dix pays européens. L'étude démontre qu'une personne en recherche d'emploi a 7,7% de chances en moins de trouver un Contrat à Durée Indéterminée (CDI) qu'il y a dix ans. En Italie, en Hongrie, en République Tchèque et en Pologne, l'emploi précaire a augmenté "plus que la moyenne". En Allemagne, les chances pour un chômeur ou un inactif de signer un CDI ont baissé de 7%. En revanche, au Danemark et en Grande-Bretagne, une personne en recherche d'emploi a plus de chance de signer un CDI (13% et 10% de hausse). L'institut IAB explique cette différence par la souplesse des procédures de licenciement dans ces pays. En France, le nombre de personnes signant un CDI a augmenté de 2% en dix ans.⁶⁴

Thus, a law passed by the conservative French government led by Dominique de Villepin in July 2005 gave the employers the right to hire employees on a temporary basis, and to renew this if need be, despite massive mobilization against it.⁶⁵ Regardless of the fact that even President Chirac urged employers not to implement it, this reform represented a legal landmark that has paved the way for a significant step towards creeping job insecurity alongside a profound redefinition of professional statuses. This is in phase with the current and disputed *loi El Khomri*, or *loi travail*

⁵⁹ *La Dépêche du Midi* (2007) 'Thierry Breton a soutenu le parachute doré de Forgeard', *La Dépêche du Midi* [online] 19 April. Available from: <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2007/04/19/395034-thierry-breton-a-soutenu-le-parachute-dore-de-forgeard.html> [Accessed 29 August 2010].

⁶⁰ Berber, M. (2005) 'Parachute doré pour patron licencié', *Radio France International* [online] 22 April. Available from: http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/064/article_35703.asp [Accessed 29 August 2010].

⁶¹ Paul Ariès in *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁶² Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Chapter Four, op. cit.

⁶³ Doogan, K. (2009) *New Capitalism? The Transformation of Work*, op. cit., pp. 204-206.

⁶⁴ *Le Monde* & Agence France Presse (2011) 'La précarité, prix à payer pour travailler en Europe', *Le Monde* [online] 15 December. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2011/12/15/la-precarite-prix-a-payer-pour-travailler-en-europe_1619444_3234.html [Accessed 15 December 2011].

⁶⁵ Lallement, M. (2010), *Le Travail sous tension*, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

which was fast-tracked by François Hollande's government in 2016.⁶⁶ In France, successive policies introduced through the back door and on the sly have implemented the Anglo-Saxon neo-liberal model as the only viable way, despite an increase in the number of the working poor.⁶⁷ The workplace is therefore defined by supposedly rational parameters in which the real productivities have been replaced with short-termist, lacklustre and privatised ones, which suits the all-persuasive nature of neo-liberal domination insofar as people submit in the absence of alternatives. Even though psycho-analyst Marie Pezé defines the role of work as 'le pacificateur social le plus efficace',⁶⁸ an ambiguous observation at its best during the Fordist compromise,⁶⁹ the perennality of a working outcast can now be linked to globalisation. As a matter of fact, one out of five homeless people work nowadays in France,⁷⁰ therefore forming a marginal group whose characteristics are to be paradoxically within and outside society. More and more fragmented, this group is formed by a myriad of underclasses that are at best identified with the jumbled euphemism 'les laissés-pour-compte' (the outcasts), the other meaning of which is, interestingly, 'marchandise dont aucun client ne veut'.⁷¹ Presented otherwise, a new hybrid category of individuals with no addresses, mainly working in the service industries as office cleaners or underpaid migrants at the rear of illegal textile workshops or restaurants, raised the question of the price to be paid for this model of pacification at all costs, an issue also addressed within film and literature in the following chapters of this thesis. Guillaume de Calignon writes:

Ainsi, 60% des salariés SDF touchent un salaire inférieur à 900 euros par mois. "La majorité a un emploi sous contrat précaire, voire sans contrat de travail du tout, pour 22% d'entre eux. Tout concourt à ce qu'ils ne trouvent pas de toit", explique Jérôme Accardo, chef de département à l'Insee. D'ailleurs, "les hommes sans domicile sont souvent ouvriers du bâtiment (20%) ou employés dans l'hôtellerie ou la restauration (22%). Près de la moitié des femmes qui travaillent

⁶⁶ Vignaud, M. (2016) 'Loi El Khomri: pourquoi faciliter les licenciements peut favoriser l'emploi', *Le Point* [online] 07 March. Available from: <http://www.lepoint.fr/economie/loi-el-khomri-pourquoi-faciliter-les-licenciements-peut-favoriser-l-emploi>; and also, *Service Désintox* (2016) La loi El Khomri, intox à gogo. *Libération* [online] 09 March. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/desintox/2016/03/09/la-loi-el-khomri-intox-a-gogo_1438026 [Accessed 07 June 2016].

⁶⁷ Booth, R. (2016) 'More than 7m Britons now in precarious employment', *The Guardian* [online] 15 November. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/15/more-than-7m-britons-in-precarious-employment> [Accessed 16 November 2016].

⁶⁸ Marie Pezé in *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel carré [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁶⁹ Lipietz, A. & Leborgne, D. (1996) 'Social and Ecological Impact of Globalization', *BlogLipietz.net* [online] May. Available from: <http://lipietz.net/spip.php?article355> [Accessed 11 June 2016].

⁷⁰ *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁷¹ *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales* [online] Available from: <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/laiss%C3%A9-pour-compte> [Accessed 09 July 2011].

sont quant à elles employées dans les services aux particuliers", note l'Insee. Ces secteurs rémunèrent en général moins bien leurs salariés.⁷²

In such a regressive context, a phenomenon of sub-proletarianisation of the workforce emerges as there are no such things as basic rights and protections for 'workers with no addresses'. Unlocalised, precarious workers cannot organise themselves, even make viable plans within society or join a union. However, in *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011), scholar Guy Standing, who is a co-founder of the Basic Income Earth Network,⁷³ posits an interesting speculation. According to him, a heterogeneous and global class that he names the precariat has emerged, still in its infancy and distinct in many ways from the declining proletariat. Given that a significant number of its members are rather educated; his argument is that they might hold the key for developing class consciousness, therefore inscribing their critical thinking for change in a political project that remains to be seen.⁷⁴

In contrast, clusters of protests that keep re-mapping the world are indeed expressions of resistance against it.⁷⁵ They scrupulously rehabilitate the indispensable parameters of spatiality as the vector through which the real is to be transformed and globalisation 'reined in' by the emergence of movements, e.g ATTAC in France.⁷⁶ One of the first pedagogical steps of the network has precisely been to reinsert the market into a specific ideological and political neo-liberal framework in order to identify and clarify once and for all the legitimacy and status of the former. Moreover, the idea of Serge Latouche's 'society of degrowth', which consists of reversing the exponential growth that represents a threat to the world's finite resources and on

⁷² De Calignon, G. (2014) 'Près d'un quart des sans-domicile fixe occupent un emploi', *Les Echos* [online] 07 April. Available from: <http://www.lesechos.fr/economie-politique/france/actu/0203427370173-pres-d-un-quart-des-sans-domicile-fixe-occupent-un-emploi-662850.php> [Accessed 12 May 2014].

⁷³ Founded in 1986, the *Basic Income European Network* (BIEN) aims to serve as a link between individuals and groups committed to, or interested in, basic income, i.e. an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement, and to foster informed discussion on this topic throughout Europe. Members of BIEN include academics, students and social policy practitioners as well as people actively engaged in political, social and religious organisations. They vary in terms of disciplinary backgrounds and political affiliations no less than in terms of age and citizenship. Available from: <http://www.basicincome.org/about-bien/> [Accessed 21 June 2015].

⁷⁴ Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic).

⁷⁵ Rogers, S. (2011) 'Occupy protests around the world: full list visualised', *The Guardian* [online] 14 November. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

⁷⁶ Founded in 1998 following an editorial by Ignacio Ramonet untitled 'Disarm the market', the Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens demands the introduction of the Tobin tax on currency speculation and is involved in tackling numerous issues related to globalisation.

which our addicted consuming western societies depend, has also become a viable alternative through the 2000s. He states:

Une politique de décroissance pourrait consister d'abord à réduire voire à supprimer le poids sur l'environnement des charges qui n'apportent aucune satisfaction. La remise en question du volume considérable des déplacements d'hommes et de marchandises, avec l'impact négatif correspondant (donc une "relocalisation" de l'économie) [...].⁷⁷

These bold alternatives take an opposing stance to that of a workplace run for the maximisation of profits insofar as they don't offer an inward-looking deglobalisation defined by blind protectionism.

2. Control and discipline

La croyance fonctionnaliste dans la coopération de tous au système permet de croire au développement simultané des organisations et des individus, et de penser que la simple amélioration des communications permet de trouver des compromis productifs équitables et performants. (Brunel, V. (2004) *Les managers de l'âme*, p. 8).

Just-in-time production

In factories, Taylorism,⁷⁸ and then Fordism,⁷⁹ had already dissected time into a fragmentation of repetitive and swift tasks that would maximise the productivity of the assembly lines in order to prevent workers from 'lazing around'. Such methods of control were nevertheless compensated for by a strong belonging to a collective in which cooperation and openness were salutary. Both elements played a moderating role that could counterbalance, if not reverse, the health hazards, a vertical and rigid organisational structure as well as harsh working conditions. Paradoxically, reducing the worker to a simple machine whose purpose was to carry out specific tasks protected them from being subjected to manipulation, so long as a sense of detachment would be maintained.⁸⁰ Because of modest but steady pay raises that had a positive impact on their purchasing power and standard of living, the workforce could also afford to buy the goods it had produced.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Latouche, S. (2003) 'Pour une société de décroissance', *Le Monde diplomatique* [online] November Edition. Available from: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2003/11/LATOUCHE/10651> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

⁷⁸ A brief definition of the characteristics of Taylorism is given on page 17 (see footnote n° 30).

⁷⁹ Fordism was a dominant economic and social system that was commonplace in the factories of the industrial countries from the 1920s to the 1970s. Invented by Henry Ford (1863-1947), an American industrialist, it combined mass production and mass consumption with decent wages in order to sustain economic growth and political stability.

⁸⁰ Dejours, C. (2000) *Travail, usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail*, op. cit., p. 69.

⁸¹ In this respect, Fordism excelled at blurring the latent antagonism between the status of consumer and that of wage earner. Both parties had managed to literally reach a truce, if not an unequivocal

In workplaces, mainly in the secondary sector, the predominant vertical hierarchy of the Taylorist and Fordist systems that was enforced through a rigid and disciplinary structure has receded and has been replaced with a reticular one, giving way to an insidious network of control: Toyotism. Invented in Japan in Toyota car factories in the 1960s, the Toyota Production System (known as TPS) has since pollinated a far-reaching range of professional sectors all around the world. Known as lean or just-in-time production, the latest system replaced the collectiveness of assembly line practice with a more autonomous and decisional approach that provided each empowered individual with a stronger yet ambiguous sense of responsibility whilst facilitating the implementation of neo-liberal concepts.⁸² A set of constraints has been imposed upon the employees, within which they had to get personally involved by showing full dedication, initiative and responsibility.⁸³ Somehow the assembly lines have not disappeared. Their design has improved, their mechanisms computerised but they still have to be operated and controlled by humans, who in their turn are subjected to a panoptic form of surveillance.⁸⁴ Simply put, control is less visible, more diffused and internalised, and so are the rules attached to it given that these can be subjected to all sorts of interpretation as we shall discover with the redefinition of bullying explored in the last part of this section. These are neither strictly vertical nor horizontal but both at the same time, making them even more restrictive in every aspect.⁸⁵

Today's work organisations are therefore built on numerous and fundamental contradictions. On the one hand, one expects and encourages more involvement and autonomy from the employee, expectations which, laudable though they may be, also lead to an increase in constraints and pressures. In the predominant service industries, there is a growing minority of pressurised employees confronted by 'inclusive' systems of exploitation which thrive on such contradictions, at the same time as being imposed by the management. (For instance, one out of two employees is submitted to systematic control regarding the completion of their working hours in France.)⁸⁶ On

coherence, at least during periods of economic growth and relative social stability. Such a paradigm, which underlines the unquestionable adaptability of capitalism, becomes inadequate when individual responsibility is excluded from the equation.

⁸² Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 128.

⁸³ Askenazy, P. (2004) *Les désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil & La République des Idées), pp. 15-20.

⁸⁴ Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin), p. 195.

⁸⁵ See Perraud, J-F. (1998) *Pouvoir, contrôle et hiérarchies* (Paris: Editions La Découverte).

⁸⁶ Lallement, M. (2010) *Le Travail sous tension*, op. cit., p. 54.

the other, in advocating the advent of supposedly discipline-free and ‘egalitarian’ work organisations, a surveillance system has been set up under the guise of implementing all sorts of personal development theories in the workplace. Boltanski and Chiapello point out:

La volonté d'utiliser de *nouveaux gisements de compétences* chez des travailleurs jusque-là soumis au travail parcellaire en favorisant leur engagement conduit également à accroître le niveau d'exploitation. L'exploitation est en effet renforcée par la mise au travail de capacités humaines (de relation, de disponibilité, de souplesse, d'implication affective, d'engagement, etc.) que le taylorisme, précisément parce qu'il traitait les hommes comme des machines, ne cherchait pas à atteindre et ne pouvait atteindre. Or, cet asservissement des qualités humaines remet en question la séparation, inscrite dans le droit, entre le travail et le travailleur.⁸⁷

This system combines discretion and efficiency whilst blurring the distinction between the supervisors and the supervised in what is presented as a self-regulated hierarchy and impersonal management echoing those of the self-regulation that supposedly operates in the global market sphere.⁸⁸ Thus work organisations have not broken off from Taylorism as the latter still plays a substantial role, yet in an intrinsic manner. In some companies, the objectives set by the management are presented as neither amendable nor negotiable and the required tasks have to be performed to a prescriptive and approved standard. This pressure for constant readaptation holds the employee in a state of permanent ‘beginner-ness’ and vulnerability given that ‘[...] l’ajustement structurel a surtout ajusté le monde aux revendications des détenteurs du capital.’⁸⁹ As Danièle Linhart claims:

Mais il faut relever aussi que les difficultés, pour les salariés, se sont accrues en raison d'une stratégie managériale bien particulière: l'organisation taylorienne du travail (qui inscrivait la contrainte et le contrôle dans la définition même des tâches) n'étant plus aussi efficace, l'idée s'est ancrée au sein des directions qu'une déstabilisation systématique des salariés les rendrait plus réceptifs, plus enclins à répondre positivement aux exigences de leur hiérarchie. D'où la mise en place de changements incessants: restructurations, réorganisations, externalisations, déménagements, mobilité systématiques. Dans ce contexte fébrile et instable, où les salariés ont toujours tout à recommencer, ils vivent dans la peur de se trouver en situation d'incompétence.⁹⁰

As a consequence of ‘unceasing changes’, the gap between the employee and the tasks becomes untenable insofar as stress levels, loss of control and meaninglessness keep fuelling each other. The truth is that in France alone, one worker out of eight suffers from RSI.⁹¹ As analysed by Paul Ariès, repetitive tasks can be construed as

⁸⁷ Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 336.

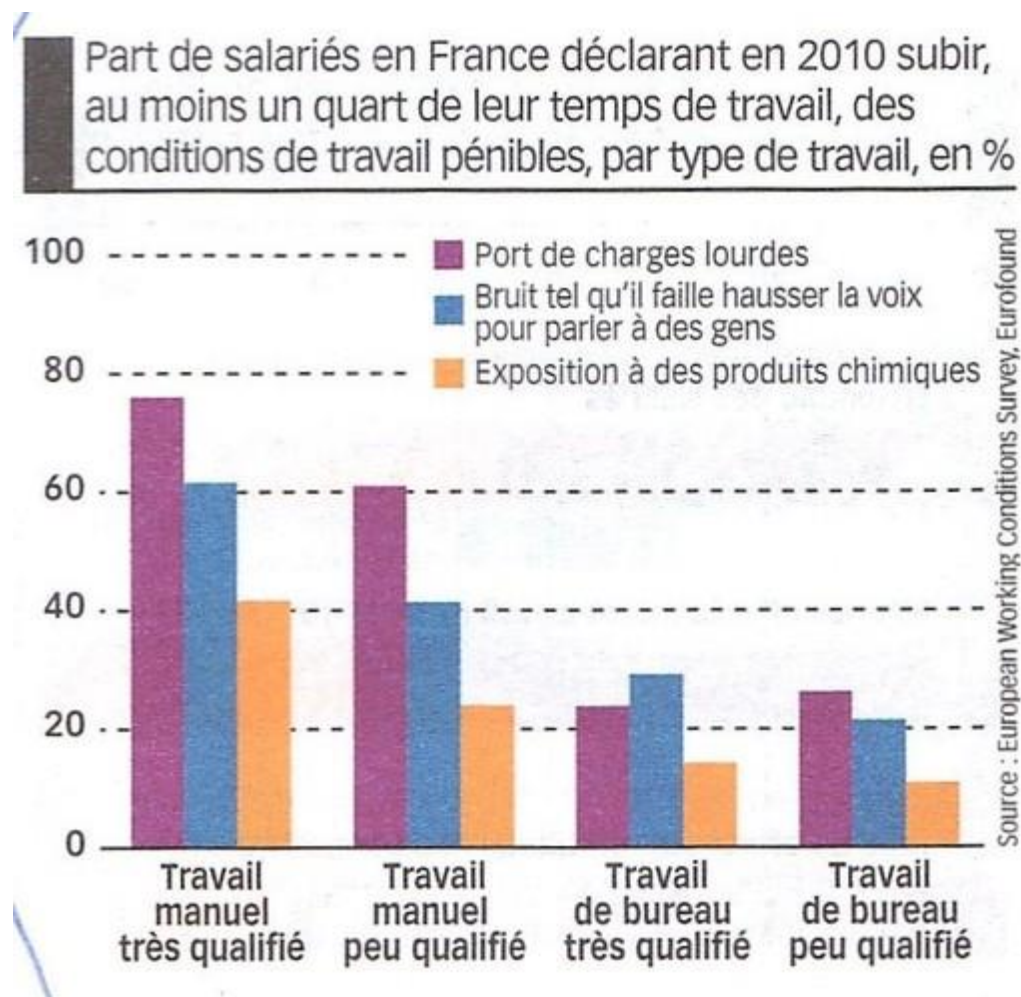
⁸⁸ See Weber, M. (1992) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London & New York: Routledge).

⁸⁹ Généreux, J. (2011) *La dissociété* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 80.

⁹⁰ Linhart, D. (2010) ‘Une confrontation épuisante avec des exigences sans fin’, *Le Monde* [online] 09 September. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2010/09/09/une-confrontation-epuisante-avec-des-exigences-sans-fin_1408793_3260.html [Accessed 05 August 2014].

⁹¹ Repetitive Strain Injury (troubles musculo-squelettiques (TMS)).

confinement that leads to psychological damage, resulting in a profound rift between the worker and their activities in the long run.⁹² The following graph gives details of how the arduous nature of work affects workers depending on their professional category by assessing the percentage of three given parameters: the carrying of heavy loads, the level of noise and the exposure to chemicals. One observes that a high percentage of qualified manual jobs are subjected to onerous tasks compared to the less qualified ones. This can be explained by the production rates of these tasks and the increasing responsibility that is expected from specific employees in factories and warehouses. As for office jobs, the disparities between the qualified and the less qualified are minimal insofar as computerised management has become the norm.⁹³



⁹² See Ariès, P. (1997) *Les Fils de McDo* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan).

⁹³ Paugam, S. (2007) *Le Salarié de la précarité. Les nouvelles formes de l'insertion professionnelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), pp. 226-230.

Bernard Mandeville, a doctor and pamphleteer in the 18th century (1670-1733), writes: 'The organisation of the factory is based on the military model'. He defines the manufacture as 'an enforced hierarchical organisation where communication is constantly scrutinized.'⁹⁴ Interestingly, the major difference between French and British manufacturing companies is that in the latter working in silence is the golden rule whereas the French are described as very noisy. Nonetheless, silent or noisy, the labouring classes of both countries were submitted to the same ruthless and oppressive system where all forms of exchange were apprehended as a loss in productivity as well as potentially subversive.

Does today's company resemble a military complex as it did in the 18th century? Yes and no. Technological progress and Toyotist methods have made the means of surveillance more horizontal, and control, in the guise of a gentler discipline, has become more pernicious and insidious. Stifling and criminalising any social protest starts with singling out disruptive workers and making an example of them. In December 2008, *Le Figaro* reported that an employee from a Michelin factory in Cholet (Maine-et-Loire) was sacked and another made redundant because they both had expressed criticism regarding their working conditions on the Internet. According to the management, this decision was taken on the grounds that these employees were disloyal towards the company whilst the CGT denounced a violation of the freedom of expression and referred the matter to *les prud'hommes*.⁹⁵ At Amazon, prior to obtaining a contract, employees working in a warehouse in Montélimar are obliged to initial a letter of confidentiality which covers not only competitors but also their family and friends, according to *Libération*.⁹⁶ What are MNCs like Michelin and Amazon afraid of? What do they truly expect from their staff? Their overblown reaction substantiates the internalised process of psychologization put in place by the means of control. Thus, the objectives of control used by management are set to make commonplace a process of underlying dependency that undermines the employees' sense of responsibility and autonomy given that these are only possible on

⁹⁴ In Mandeville, B. (2010) *The Fable of the Bees*, Kindle Edition, volume 1.

⁹⁵ *Le Figaro* (2013) 'Un salarié de Michelin licencié pour s'être épanché sur le net', *Le Figaro* [online] 17 December. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2008/12/13/01016-20081213ARTFIG00580-un-salarie-de-michelin-licencie-pour-s-etre-epanche-sur-le-net-.php> [Accessed 18 December 2014].

⁹⁶ *Libération* (2013) 'Une employée d'Amazon raconte "la peur organisée"', *Libération* [online] 13 December. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2013/12/17/une-employee-d-amazon-raconte-la-peur-organisee_967185 [Accessed 18 December 2014].

management terms. Interestingly, 'parent company' translates into French as 'maison mère'. In that respect, Vincent de Gaulejac explains:

Il [le pouvoir managérial] met en œuvre un ensemble de techniques qui captent les désirs et les angoisses pour les mettre au service de l'entreprise. Il transforme l'énergie libidinale en force de travail. Il enferme les individus dans un système paradoxal qui les conduit à une soumission librement consentie.⁹⁷

Conversely, Crozier and Friedberg in *L'acteur et le système* have by all means defended the conception that the company cannot entirely transform the individual to the point of their unconditional subordination.⁹⁸ In both sociologists' accounts, there is always a way to temper with any organised system, however extremely control-based it may be. They also dispute the fact that an individual is no match for an organisation, as the latter is shaped by a multiplicity of intertwined factors; the most important of these being the necessity to constantly negotiate at every level between the different parties through a continuous power struggle process. According to their views, organisations' invincibility should be considered a trap for the unwary. They claim:

Contre les illusions des théoriciens de la domination et du conditionnement, mais aussi contre les fantasmes de toute puissance et de simplification qui surgissent constamment chez les hommes d'action, il faut donc affirmer avec force que la conduite humaine ne saurait être assimilée en aucun cas au produit mécanique de l'obéissance ou de la pression des données structurelles. Elle est toujours l'expression et la mise en œuvre d'une liberté, si minime soit-elle.⁹⁹

Such an affirmation of the resilience and quasi-existentialist conception of freedom that prevail for the individual in any circumstance has been disputed since the emergence of the third age of capitalism that has given globalisation its orientations since the mid-1970s. Crozier and Friedberg keep reminding us of an alternative that stands up to scrutiny. They are keen to stress that the members of the organisation, and one assumes that these members have to be taken in a broad hierarchical sense, have the power to win over any equivocal attempt of control. Both sociologists state:

Ils [the members of the organisation] n'accepteront de mobiliser leurs ressources et d'affronter les risques inhérents à toute relation de pouvoir qu'à condition de trouver dans l'organisation des enjeux suffisamment pertinents au regard de leurs atouts et de leurs objectifs, et suffisamment importants pour justifier une mobilisation de leur part.¹⁰⁰

It is true that an incontrovertible element is missing in their analysis, that of decades of bust and boom and periods of mass unemployment that have occurred

⁹⁷ De Gaulejac, V. (2009) *La société malade de la gestion*, op. cit., p. 39.

⁹⁸ Crozier, M. & Friedberg, E. (1977) *L'acteur et le système*, op. cit.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

since the book's publication in 1977. The current neo-liberal arrangement is therefore built on undermining the unemployed and reinforcing a sense of insecurity by raising work to the rank of a cornerstone value while unemployment has reached record levels in France as the result of the axing of jobs.¹⁰¹ Last but not least, the increase in terms of numbers of internships also amplifies its dysfunctions. This is highlighted by *Génération précaire*, a collective created in 2005 whose goal is to address and tackle young workers' precarity which results from the continuous renewal of internships that never translate into paid and long term positions:

Le collectif Génération précaire se bat depuis 2005 pour amener le débat dans la sphère publique, mais pourtant les abus continuent. De 800 000 stagiaires il y a quelques années, nous sommes passés à près de 1,5 million en 2010. Les étudiants ne font plus un seul stage de fin d'étude, mais plusieurs stages tout au long de leur parcours académique. La multiplication des stages par étudiant découle de cette pénurie d'emplois. Drôle de société dans laquelle nous vivons où il y a du travail (les stages le prouvent) mais pas d'emplois.¹⁰²

Yet the crux of the matter here is to measure the real impact on whether a system of exploitation has succeeded in making the workforce believe that there are no alternatives, belittling the perception of the importance of social issues as merely private, petty and against the common good. The battle for control goes on and examples to corroborate this are rife. Robert Linhart in *L'Etabli* (1978) observes that the three Yugoslavians who work together on the assembly line have formed their own very effective sub-team united by a discreet resistance which allows one of them to take regular short but vital breaks without jeopardising their productivity.¹⁰³ If the essential role played by these little breaks is unquantifiable and therefore antagonistic with Taylorist methods, their negative effects on productivity have proved to be groundless, not to mention the spreading of subversive ideas among staff that might threaten the company's good working order. More drastic measures can also be undertaken when a worker cannot cope and needs a break.¹⁰⁴ Obstructionism is for example an alternative strategy that was created by the Italian railway workers at the beginning of the 20th century. It manifests itself through passive resistance, over-

¹⁰¹ Peillon, L. (2015) 'En 2014, 75 000 emplois ont été détruits en France', *Libération* [online] 11 March. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2015/03/11/en-2014-74-000-emplois-ont-ete-detruits-en-france_1218655 [Accessed 12 March 2015].

¹⁰² Khamarou, H. (2011) 'Chômage, stages, précarité: les jeunes, ces "esclaves modernes"', *Le Nouvel Observateur & Rue89* [Online] 11 March. Available from: <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2011/03/11/chomage-stages-precarite-les-jeunes-ces-esclaves-modernes-194197> [Accessed 23 March 2015].

¹⁰³ Linhart, R. (1978) *L'Etabli* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit), p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Hamper, B. (1991) *Rivthead, Tales from the Assembly Line* (New York: Grand Central Publishing), op. cit., p. 43.

zealousness and over-legalism and is a ‘procédé de sabotage à rebours qui consiste à appliquer avec un soin méticuleux les règlements, à faire la besogne dont chacun a charge avec une sage lenteur et un soin exagéré.’¹⁰⁵ As for Ben Hamper in *Rivthead*, workers on the assembly lines of General Motors not only have to constantly deal with the monotony of their tasks but also to put their sense of solidarity to the test when the need for resisting management’s unreasonable demands makes the decision of using sabotage an imperative.¹⁰⁶ The ruses and tricks are also transmitted from the older workers to the young and the experienced to the inexperienced in order to subvert what the employers impose. As Fredric Jameson observes: ‘Normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies seek to contest and to undermine the dominant “value system”.’¹⁰⁷ Subterranean modes of subversion slip through the system, which constitutes a form, however low-profile, of resistance. In spite of the prescribed work that has become the managerial norm and is enforced as such, reliance to resistance as cheating can also be justified as a rational decision for properly doing one’s job.

The language of control

Les difficultés pour combattre cette barbarie douce relèvent donc de sa nature même. Elle rend plus difficile la révolte parce qu’elle s’attaque au creuset culturel qui lui donnait un sens et que son discours lisse n’offre pas de prise. Peut-on se révolter contre la "modernité", contre l'"autonomie", contre la "transparence" et contre la "convivialité"? (Le Goff, J-P. (1999) *La barbarie douce*, p. 116).

In 1973, following the announcement that Lip, a watch-making company based in Besançon, was officially liquidated, one of the ex-workers filmed by Christian Rouaud remembers that during the meeting with the managers a fellow-worker snatched a confidential paper on which was written: ‘400 ou 500 travailleurs à élaguer’ whereas another certified that the verb used was ‘larguer’. Notwithstanding the slight confusion that resulted whether ‘élaguer’ was used instead of ‘larguer’ or vice versa,¹⁰⁸ both agreed that the explicit phrasing of this document was the triggering factor of the social struggle to come.¹⁰⁹ Evidently, the real impact of the liquidation was not supposed to be revealed at this stage of the consultation. This

¹⁰⁵ Pouget, E. (2004) *Le Sabotage* (Paris: Editions Mille et une nuits), p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ Hamper, B. (1991) *Rivthead, Tales from the Assembly Line*, op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁰⁷ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious* (London & New York: Routledge), p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ At least, the meaning of these two verbs was unequivocal.

¹⁰⁹ *Les Lip, l’imagination au pouvoir* (2007) Directed by Christian Rouaud [Documentary Film]. France: Les Films d’Ici.

ascertains the determinant role, either or not in a concealed manner, of language at every stage of any social conflict and workplace reform. The question we shall address is this: what comes first, the word or the deed? The intention is to highlight the imbrication of ideology and of the use of a slippery language in order to implement the former's policies.

In France, the emergence of globalisation was discreetly facilitated by the State representatives with the U-turn operated by President Mitterrand and his socialist government with the nomination of modernizer Laurent Fabius as Prime Minister in 1984. The reshuffle excluding communist ministers was a strong signal towards the markets and went along with the acceptance that the left and its ideals of radical change had been defeated, at least for the French Socialist Party, without officially ratifying such an admission. The ideological forfeiture is brilliantly fictionalised in François Salvaing's novel *La Boîte* (2001) explored in Section Two of Chapter Four of this thesis.¹¹⁰ According to former minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, this neo-liberal but supposedly temporary 'parenthesis' which was initiated in 1983 by the government is still open more than thirty years later.¹¹¹ In 1985, the President of the European Commission and Socialist Jacques Delors initiated the liberation of the capital movements within Europe. Thus neo-liberalism has been at the heart of all the successive treaties that have shaped the union since. The unspoken gap therefore caused by a neo-liberal project that has never been fully recognised by the political class transpires in the language used by politicians and employers to push for reforms; a terminological shift to consensual politics given that the centre-left has embraced the laws of the market which has consequently alienated the working class. As Bastien Bonnefous explains:

Quand cette politique qui s'exprime en bannissant toute aspérité est menée par la gauche, l'effet social et démocratique n'en est que plus désastreux, car "*l'histoire de la gauche est jalonnée de marqueurs très forts dans le vocabulaire et leur disparition n'en est que plus spectaculaire*", explique l'historien Christian Delporte, auteur d'*Une histoire de la langue de bois* (Flammarion, 2009), qui remarque que "*le PS ne parle plus depuis longtemps des ouvriers, ni même des travailleurs, mais des salariés noyés dans le grand ensemble flou des classes moyennes*".¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Salvaing, F. (1998) *La Boîte* (Paris: Editions Fayard).

¹¹¹ *Marianne* (2014) 'Chevènement: 'La "parenthèse libérale" de 1983 ne s'est jamais refermée'', Available from: http://www.marianne.net/Chevenement-La-parenthese-liberale-de-1983-ne-s-est-jamais-refermee_a240838.html *Marianne* [online] 28 August. [Accessed 30 August 2014].

¹¹² Bonnefous, B. (2014) 'Les mots creux', *Le Monde* [online] 19 October. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/10/19/les-mots-creux_4508643_3232.html [Accessed 03 October 2015].

In the same period subterfuge was certainly less necessary in countries like Great Britain or the USA already ideologically in synch with the free market and dominant ‘neo-liberal doxa’ despite the strong opposition of the British miners and their union representatives during Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s first government (1979-1983). As reality has been shaped by industrial conflict and defeat through the traditional labour movement, the role of language is therefore more symptomatic and retrospective, asserting a victory that was won elsewhere, not just linguistically.¹¹³ Actual struggles – political, social and economic – laid the underpinning for linguistic shifts, rather than the other way round. As Bourdieu clarifies: ‘What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief.’¹¹⁴ Despite the relevance of the quotation, it has proved to be difficult for professional bodies and employees to set a system of defence against an apparently neutral but pervasive jargon that is a vehicle for globalisation. This, for instance, has paved the way for ideological reforms in the public sector.¹¹⁵ Are employees subtly driven into complying with the destabilisation processes induced by neo-liberal narratives (via the media, centre-left-wing and right-wing politicians, management teams, hearsay and rumours)? The discourse of the mainstream economists and politicians has therefore converged. The enforced social illusion that all classes defend the same interests and share the same project is therefore reiterated to precisely refute the disparities between classes.

In the light of Michel Foucault’s *disciplinary societies* that reach their apogee at the beginning of the 20th century before being subjected to decline and crisis, Gilles Deleuze defines in *L’autre journal* the emergence of *societies of control*.¹¹⁶ He states that, ‘Dans les sociétés disciplinaires, on n’arrêtait pas de recommencer (de l’école à la caserne, de la caserne à l’usine), tandis que dans les sociétés de contrôle on n’en finit jamais avec rien, l’entreprise, la formation, le service étant les états métastables et coexistants d’une même modulation, comme d’un déformateur universel.’ According to him, ‘control’ is at the heart of the functioning of the language of

¹¹³ Cusset, F. (2006) *La Décennie, Le grand cauchemar des années 1980* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), pp. 114-124.

¹¹⁴ Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 170.

¹¹⁵ Dujarier, M-A. (2008) *Le Travail du consommateur* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), pp. 142-143.

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, G. (1990) ‘Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle’, *L’autre journal* [online] May 1990, p. 2. <https://sites.google.com/site/deleuzemedia/textes/post-scriptum-sur-les-societes-de-contrôle> [Accessed 08 March 2018].

globalisation within the world of corporations. It is characterised by an elusive system of domination that destabilises the classic forms of countervailing power, e.g. the unions. In this respect, he wonders whether '[...] liés dans toute leur histoire à la lutte contre les disciplines ou dans les milieux d'enfermement, pourront-ils [les syndicats] s'adapter ou laisseront-ils la place à de nouvelles formes de résistance contre les sociétés de contrôle ? Peut-on déjà saisir des ébauches de ces formes à venir, capables de s'attaquer aux joies du marketing ?'¹¹⁷ In the subsequent chapters, new individual forms of resistance such as whistleblowing versus *societies of control* will be explored within literature and film.

Since the 1990s, a phenomenon of an unrevealed form of control has also started to emerge in factories and offices. The golden rule is to encourage as many employees as possible to share a certain degree of privacy with management. Companies one works for are very eager to have detail of their staff's employment history and skills but also private aspects of their personal life, interests and aspirations.¹¹⁸ What all of this demonstrates is that alongside the mechanisms of control implemented from the early stages of the selection process, each individual story is then assimilated, polished, formatted and buffered by experts in communication. Thus these stories give propaganda some sort of shared and touching respectability as well as universal attraction. On the surface, everything looks as if new managerialism has won. It has broadly established a rather convincing set of narratives which promises liberation from any hardship. It promotes individual responsibility, which has all the attributes of emancipation whilst achieving the contrary. Yet who is duped into believing the veracity of the messages and representations? Reality ends up biting back, as Jean-Pierre Le Goff puts it:

Cette déshumanisation pratique s'accompagne de façon systématique de discours généraux et abstraits sur l'"éthique", les "valeurs", la "culture d'entreprise", qui elles aussi donnent lieu à de nombreuses études et manipulations de la part des spécialistes. Brandies par les directions, ces valeurs sont censées "donner du sens" par en haut à une activité que dans le même temps on déstructure par en bas et qu'on rend, à proprement parler, insignifiante.¹¹⁹

Writer Eric Hazan for instance reflects upon the deceptive mechanisms of the double discourse in *LQR (Lingua Quintae Respublica: la langue de la Vème*

¹¹⁷ Deleuze, G. (1990) 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle', *L'autre journal* [online] May 1990, p. 2. <https://sites.google.com/site/deleuzemedia/textes/post-scriptum-sur-les-societes-de-contrôle> [Accessed 08 March 2018].

¹¹⁸ *Geek Attitude* (2012) 'Lorsque les entreprises demandent les identifiants Facebook à leurs employés', *Geek Attitude* [online] 20 March. Available from: <http://geekattitu.de/2012/03/20/lorsque-les-entreprises-demandent-les-identifiants-facebook-a-leurs-employes/> [Accessed 20 December 2013].

¹¹⁹ Le Goff, J-P. (1999) *La barbarie douce*, op. cit., p. 35.

République), *La propagande du quotidien* (2006),¹²⁰ a publication in which he dissects the French Newspeak resulting in the combination of the heroic rhetoric used by the Resistance during WW2 with the pompous and ultra-official style of politicians of the Third Republic (1870-1940). The Language of the Fifth Republic which appeared in the 1960s in the middle of *les Trente Glorieuses* (1945-1975) was made commonplace and propagated by the ORTF (the French centralised State agency controlling TV and radio stations).¹²¹ His reflection tends to present the LQR as if neo-liberal hegemony has been underhandedly imposed in France through the use of an emollient language.¹²² Reviewing the essay in *Le Monde diplomatique*, François Brune writes:

Dans un style dense et précis, Eric Hazan démystifie tous ces vocables qui tentent, chaque jour, de nous faire accepter l'inacceptable. L'arme maîtresse dont use et abuse le discours dominant, c'est l'euphémisme: il nomme sa propagande *communication*, ses licenciements *restructuration*, ses victimes des *exclus*. Il substitue au mot "politique", pour se déresponsabiliser, la très fonctionnelle gouvernance, qui positive en s'adaptant aux contraintes extérieures ou aux impératifs de la modernité.¹²³

Hazan's work is inspired by that of German philologist Victor Klemperer whose comprehensive, meticulous and autobiographical study of the language of the Third Reich (1933-1945), dissects the manipulations carried out upon the German language in order to win over the masses during the Nazi years of power.¹²⁴ With 1.5 million unemployed in 1929 and 6 million in 1932, hyperinflation and the dire economic situation in Germany following the Great Depression (1929-1939) facilitated a linguistic infiltration effectively implemented by Goebbels' propaganda.¹²⁵ Yet the analogy is not to everyone's taste. Sociologist Thierry Tirbois lambasted Hazan's recycled critical analysis.¹²⁶

To Hazan's credit, his analysis carries salient elements that are relevant to this section. One of the specific features of this discourse is to systematically avoid the use of terminology referring directly to any expression of social disturbances that could potentially threaten the established order. He defines the LQR as 'un écran

¹²⁰ Hazan, E. (2006) *LQR, La propagande du quotidien* (Paris: Raisons d'agir).

¹²¹ Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française (1964-1974).

¹²² In both LTI and LQR, one notices that very few new words are created.

¹²³ Brune, F. (2006) 'LQR. La propagande du quotidien', *Le Monde diplomatique* [online] August Edition (p. 27). Available from: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/08/BRUNE/13820> [Accessed 16 December 2016].

¹²⁴ Klemperer, V. (1996) *LTI, la langue du IIIe Reich* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel).

¹²⁵ See the multi-awarded *La langue ne ment pas* (2003) Directed by Stan Neumann [Documentary Film]. France: Les Films d'Ici/Richard Copans.

¹²⁶ Tirbois, T. (2006) 'Eric Hazan, LQR. La propagande du quotidien', *Lectures* [online review] 14 May. Available from: <http://lectures.revues.org/290> [Accessed 09 November 2014].

sémantique permettant de faire tourner le moteur sans jamais en dévoiler les rouages [...].¹²⁷ He also demonstrates the entangled relationship between advertising and the LQR, which, as the perfect vector, is identified as a language of stimuli and emotions triggered by buzz-words that target the individuals on a subconscious level: a supposedly apolitical language to maintain or to strengthen individuals' apoliticality, a standpoint put into question by Wilhelm Reich who states that apoliticality is precisely a conscious choice despite appearances. He writes: 'L'attitude apolitique n'est pas, comme on pourrait le croire, un état psychique passif, mais une prise de position très active, une défense contre le sentiment de sa propre responsabilité politique.'¹²⁸

Paradoxically, the LQR gains momentum after the May 68 events. Freedom of speech and subversive artistic representations were at the core of the movement. One cannot forget the following slogan: 'On ne peut pas tomber amoureux d'une courbe de croissance.'¹²⁹ From powerful slogans¹³⁰ to values in vogue such as hedonism and the multiple possibilities that consumerism and unrestrained individualism would offer during the post-war boom, multi-disciplinary experts skilfully managed to overcome the incompatibilities between blind consumerism and utopian aspirations for an alternative society insofar as 'la récupération de la critique contribue à l'extension des marchés.'¹³¹ In Hazan's account, whether or not it is identified as LQR, the Newspeak was furthermore facilitated by the widespread use of a 'communicational activism' in order to substantiate the implementation of the transformations to managers, workers and unions. Thus, global markets are misrepresented as embodying 'l'horizon indépassable de notre temps'.¹³² Simply put, there is no alternative. A general sense of pessimism mixed with cynicism among employees may also prevail following the transformations which drift towards a sense of increasing job insecurity.¹³³ The dominant discourse mainly focuses on the impossibility of overlooking the neo-liberal transformations, yet it somewhat

¹²⁷ Hazan, E. (2006) *LQR, La propagande du quotidien*, op. cit., p. 16.

¹²⁸ Reich, W. (1972) *La psychologie de masse du fascisme* (Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages), p. 278.

¹²⁹ Needless to say, that is exactly what the new left fell for, following the lead of managements which discourses are aimed at convincing employees to literally 'fall in love with the growth curve' of the company they work for.

¹³⁰ See Slogans de Mai 68. *La Toupie* [online]. Available from: http://www.toupie.org/Citations/Slogans_mai_68.htm [Accessed 06 June 2016].

¹³¹ Dujarier, M-A. (2008) *Le travail du consommateur*, op. cit., p. 230.

¹³² To serve my point, I have adapted a famous quote by Jean-Paul Sartre (1957): 'Le marxisme est l'horizon indépassable de notre temps.' In *Questions de méthode* (Paris: Editions Broché).

¹³³ Boltanski, L & Chiapello, E. (1999), *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit, p. 116.

struggles to mask its intrinsic hollowness. With the use of a mollifying discourse, its dogmatism utilises a given lexicon that serves to internalise the process of naturalisation of global capitalism.¹³⁴ The deed therefore comes with the word. Le Goff encapsulates the issue by writing:

Le modernisme clame haut et fort qu'il est porteur d'un "projet mobilisateur", alors qu'il est symptomatique d'un vide culturel et politique que son activisme communicationnel ne parvient pas à combler. Il s'articule au libéralisme économique et lui offre une légitimation fautive de ressources suffisantes pour s'y opposer efficacement.¹³⁵

Debunking the double discourse whose purpose is to 'sell' the system to the workforce is essential. In this way, even by highlighting in a trivial, un-scientific and caricatured manner this type of pseudo jargon with irony is in itself an expression of resistance, as the chart below illustrates.

Chart One

Le parler creux/savant¹³⁶

Chaque mot d'une colonne peut être combiné avec n'importe quel mot des autres colonnes.

Exemples: L'expression ponctue les facteurs caractéristiques de l'entreprise.

L'expérimentation mobilise les résultats systématiques des structures.

Le parler creux sans peine				
L'excellence	renforce	les facteurs	institutionnels	de la performance du dispositif de l'entreprise du groupe du projet des bénéficiaires de la hiérarchie des pratiques de la démarche des acteurs des structures
L'intervention	mobilise	les processus	organisationnels	
L'objectif	révèle	les paramètres	qualitatifs	
Le diagnostic	stimule	les changements	analytiques	
L'expérimentation	modifie	les concepts	caractéristiques	
La formation	clarifie	les savoir-faire	motivationnels	
L'évaluation	renouvelle	les problèmes	pédagogiques	
La finalité	identifie	les indicateurs	représentatifs	
L'expression	perfectionne	les résultats	participatifs	
Le management	développe	les effets	cumulatifs	
La méthode	dynamise	les blocages	stratégiques	
Le vécu	programme	les besoins	neuro-	
Le recadrage	ponctue	les paradoxes	linguistiques	
			systématiques	

François Brune highlights the process of naturalisation of the neo-liberal discourse by giving the well-known example of 'tempêtes économiques', an expression which reinforces a sense of ideological irremediableness whilst presenting the market like an

¹³⁴ Boltanski, L & Chiapello, E. (1999), *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 103.

¹³⁵ Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire*, op. cit., p. 88.

¹³⁶ Le parler creux sans peine. *Politicomique, un autre regard sur la politique* [online]. Available from: <http://politicomique.chez.com/discours.htm> [Accessed 20 December 2012].

actor with a will of their own.¹³⁷ The example of Ireland and Italy literally ‘attaquées par les marchés’¹³⁸ corroborates the predominance and banalisation of a bellicose message that consolidates the perception that the workforce is embroiled in a battle of titanic proportions in which it has no control and that necessitates abnegation and sacrifices.¹³⁹ As Laïla Salah-Eddine specifies:

En état de guerre, il faut galvaniser les troupes. Selon E. Enriquez, les organisations ont toujours été des systèmes culturels, symboliques et imaginaires en affirmant certaines valeurs, en étant le lieu de projection de fantasmes individuels et collectifs, et en tentant de prendre les individus dans les mailles de l’imaginaire qu’elles proposent. La situation actuelle présente une nouvelle caractéristique: l’organisation tente de façonner les esprits et de pénétrer au plus intime de l’espace psychique des individus. " [...] en un mot, elles visent à remplacer l’identification à la nation et à l’Etat par l’identification à l’organisation qui devient ainsi le lieu sacré et transcendant auquel il est possible de se référer et de croire" (Enriquez, 1992, p. 39).¹⁴⁰

All the more, with the shrinking of established social rights by successive governments combined with rising unemployment since the 1980s, the fear of job loss is rife therefore giving this communication some sort of ambivalent credential. Professional bodies are subjected to a linguistic harassment from which the possibility of confrontation and negotiation with the ruling classes has been nullified. Marie-Anne Dujarier writes:

Dans les services publics européens, les "ayants-droit", "usagers" ou "citoyens" sont progressivement qualifiés de "clients". Cette conversion linguistique et symbolique a précédé la privatisation. Il ne s’agit pas d’une évolution qui exprimerait un changement objectif de relation. Le passage du service public, dans lequel la prestation (éventuellement payante) est encadrée par un droit politique, à un service marchand contractuel s’opère dans le vocabulaire *avant* la transformation capitaliste.¹⁴¹

The euphemised expression *plans sociaux*, which had replaced the term *restructurations*, was renamed ‘PSE’ (*plans de sauvegarde de l’emploi*) in 2002, which replaced for the second time the term *restructurations*.¹⁴² Under the so-called ‘job preservation plans’, jobs are destroyed and outsourced, as they were under the ‘social plans’ prior to 2002. From political correctness to buzz-words such as

¹³⁷ François Brune interviewed in *L’Encerclement, La démocratie dans les rets du néolibéralisme* (2009) Directed by Richard Brouillette [Documentary Film]. Québec: N&B.

¹³⁸ Koby, Y. (2012) ‘Les peuples de l’euro en crise’, *Jet d’Encre* [online] 12 December. Available from: <http://www.jetdencre.ch/les-peuples-de-leuro-en-crise-introduction-1420> [Accessed 13 July 2011].

¹³⁹ Whilst ‘attacking’ countries, markets also ‘attack’ the notion of time, according to Nicole Aubert for whom the ‘democratic time’ is incompatible with that of globalised markets. (In Aubert, N. (2003) *Le culte de l’urgence, La société malade du temps* (Paris: Editions Flammarion), p. 52.).

¹⁴⁰ Salah-Eddine, L. (2008) ‘*Le harcèlement moral au travail: analyse sociologique*’. Available from: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00343544/document> (p. 246) [online] 01 December. [Accessed 16 May 2016].

¹⁴¹ Dujarier, M-A. (2008) *Le Travail du consommateur*, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

¹⁴² Lerouge, L. (2009) ‘Les effets de la précarité du travail sur la santé: le droit du travail peut-il s’en saisir?’, *Pistes, Volume 11, n° 1* [online]. Available from: <https://pistes.revues.org/2306> [Accessed 18 September 2014].

‘consultation’ and ‘dialogue’, a notion of universal inclusiveness is systematically imposed as a precondition *sine qua non*, which keeps the capitalistic transformation one step ahead of its detractors. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello write:

[...] le capitalisme s’internationalise ainsi plus facilement et plus rapidement que les mouvements qui s’opposent à lui et dont l’unification suppose un travail long et difficile de mise en équivalence des formes de classification auxquelles s’identifient les personnes et des valeurs qui les mettent en mouvement.¹⁴³

By dismissing this communication as totally preposterous, one might take the risk of underplaying, even denying the ideological features it conveys. The burgeoning in terms of examples is rife. Part of the effectiveness of the slippery language is taking terms such as ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’, ‘challenge’, ‘flexibility’, etc, and integrating them into the audit culture. Language therefore legitimates aspects contributing to the process of the transformations that occur in the workplace. This *vocabulaire de décomposition* clearly dulls critical thinking. It has not only flourished in the aftermath of social defeats and the decline of the Marxist vocabulary but also impedes the emergence of social conflicts, making political struggle and radical action more arduous. As Boltanski and Chiapello observe:

Mentionnons pour commencer le travail effectué par les responsables d’entreprise sur *le vocabulaire utilisé*. La transformation récente du CNPF en Mouvement des Entreprises de France n’a-t-elle pas pour effet de faire disparaître du champ légitime de représentation le "patronat" puisque lui-même ne se reconnaît plus dans cette appellation [...] ? Le CNPF se présente désormais comme le représentant des entreprises, et donc pourquoi pas aussi de leurs salariés, gommant le conflit d’intérêts entre les actionnaires et les salariés.¹⁴⁴

To give another significant example, the Macron government plans to rename the law that was passed during Hollande’s presidency allowing manual workers’ early retirement, from ‘compte de pénibilité’ to ‘compte de prévention’. The rationale in justifying such a semantic change was given by Macron himself at a speech for the representatives of the CPME¹⁴⁵ during the run-up to his election. In his own words: ‘Je n’aime pas le terme [de pénibilité] donc je le supprimerai. Car il induit que le travail est une douleur.’¹⁴⁶

If Chart One above aims at mocking the hollow language of management, Chart Two below highlights how the wording of some overused expressions clearly

¹⁴³ Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 622.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁴⁵ *Confédération des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises*.

¹⁴⁶ Biseau, G. (2017) “Pénibilité”, le mot de trop pour L’Elysée’, *Libération* [online] 11 July. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/07/11/penibilite-le-mot-de-trop-pour-l-elysee_1583220 [Accessed 12 July 2017].

conceals an ideological substrate. The LQR and the transnational discourse of neo-liberalism thus converge.

Chart Two

“LQR” expressions	In layman’s terms
"l’adaptation à la réalité du marché"	"La concurrence tirant les prix vers le bas et nos coûts étant trop élevés, il faut dégraisser, délocaliser l'activité, travailler plus, tout en étant payé moins afin de maintenir au même niveau les bénéfices attendus par les actionnaires."
"la confiance des investisseurs"	"L’assurance de réaliser de plus-values importantes à court terme. La confiance des investisseurs augmente d'autant plus vite que recule la politique sociale de l'Etat et que diminue la pression fiscale. Si cela ne va pas assez vite, les investisseurs iront investir ailleurs."
"les exigences du marché"	"Que les entreprises fassent 15% de bénéfice par an, sinon le "marché" vendra ses actions. Les cours baisseront et l'entreprise sera victime d'une OPA hostile."
"équilibrer la masse salariale"	"Remplacer les CDD par des emplois précaires, ne pas renouveler les départs à la retraite et faire travailler plus les autres en les payant moins."

Source: Langue de bois (La Toupie) ¹⁴⁷

Moreover, strategies of internal and external communication in terms of semantic distribution within the company are eloquent.¹⁴⁸ The female cleaners are rebranded *techniciennes de surface* whereas street sweepers are identified as *techniciens de surface*, an interesting gender distribution that the new jargon perpetuates. The cashiers are no less than *hôtes/hôtesse de caisse* and the foremen are now identified as *animateurs d’ateliers*. The assembly line workers have turned *opérateurs*. Hence, the labouring classes are persuaded to use a Toyotist-esque lexicon that accelerates their fragmentation and that minimises the arduousness of their hardcore activities. As Beaud and Pialoux observe: ‘Les changements de dénominations qui euphémisent la dureté de la vie au travail suivent les mêmes buts : on ne doit plus dire "chaîne" mais

¹⁴⁷ Langue de bois. *La Toupie* [online] Available from: http://www.toupie.org/Textes/Langue_de_bois_1.htm [Accessed 21 December 2013].

¹⁴⁸ See Floris, B. (1996) ‘La communication managériale. La modernisation symbolique des entreprises’ [online]. Available from: <http://communinfo.free.fr/new/expose/BernardFLORIS.doc> [Accessed 20 December 2013].

"ligne", "équipe" mais "module", "OS" mais "opérateur", etc.¹⁴⁹ Behind the linguistic avant-gardism that seeps into the workplace, a neo-moralism also resurfaces with excessive euphemisation. The unions are called *partenaires sociaux*.¹⁵⁰ In some specific instances, they utilise a jargon to minimise the subsequent ideological capitulation. The unemployed are semantically stigmatised by being called *demandeurs/chercheurs d'emploi*.¹⁵¹ On this side of the Channel hourly-paid staff are called 'visiting staff'. Always looking for more work, these 'visitors' live the life of casualised workers despite their attaché-cases and laptops. Rémi Barroux writes:

Pour l'augmentation des temps partiels, le syndicaliste cite des abus dans tous les pays. Il évoque la Grèce, l'Italie, la Pologne sur le problème des "faux indépendants", ces salariés travaillant pour un employeur avec le statut d'"indépendant", ce qui évite à celui-ci de payer des charges et des cotisations sociales. Ce phénomène touchait 40,7% des salariés en Grèce en 2006, selon des chiffres de la Commission européenne.¹⁵²

In the world of work, precariousness is hence rebranded as an exciting Bohemia, which is not incompatible with maximizing profits. As it were, all the inevitable constraints which are intrinsic to the nature of the day in, day out professional activity can also be overlooked with the emergence of a simple acronym. To give an example, a *hôtesse de vente* (or *hôtesse de caisse*) is a cashier who has internalised SBAM (sourire, bonjour, au revoir et merci)¹⁵³ and whose scripted role is to make sure that the customer has a rewarding experience they will be keen to repeat. The semantic shift underlines 'la mission de relation avec la clientèle qui lui est désormais explicitement confiée.'¹⁵⁴ From the employee's perspective, it is supposed to instil a degree of active participation that upgrades the completion of the monotonous tasks by adding a pinch of personalised creativity. Yet this 'personalised creativity' is just another added – and unpaid – standardised task in guise. It is also noteworthy that the acronym has been diverted as 'sans borne automatique, merci' by the CFDT to

¹⁴⁹ Beaud, S. & Pialoux, M. (1999) *Retour sur la condition ouvrière, Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard*, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁵⁰ Partenaires sociaux. Origine de l'expression. *Politique.net* [online]. Available from: <http://www.politique.net/partenaires-sociaux.htm> [Accessed 15 June 2013].

¹⁵¹ Politiquement correct. *La Toupie* [online]. Available from: http://www.toupie.org/Textes/Politiquement_correct.htm [Accessed 20 December 2013].

¹⁵² Barroux, R. (2008) 'Les syndicats européens dénoncent la montée des emplois précaires', *Le Monde* [online] 26 March. Available from: <http://www.temoignages.re/politique/actualites/les-syndicats-europeens-denoncent-la-montee-des-emplois-precaires,29799> [Accessed 20 September 2013].

¹⁵³ Meet and greet (translated from French).

¹⁵⁴ Moati, P. (2001) *L'Avenir de la grande distribution* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob), p. 181.

support a campaign against the introduction of automated tills.¹⁵⁵ The day in, day out hurdles linked to this job are set out with great humour in Anna Sam's biographical *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (2008) that is examined in Section Four of Chapter Four.¹⁵⁶ In contrast, the powerful backlash against the CPE (*Contrat première embauche*)¹⁵⁷ in the spring of 2006, astutely rebranded *Contrat précarité extrême* by some of its opponents,¹⁵⁸ along with the numerous protests organised by the young people against its inherent precarity measures proves that the battle for control is not won.¹⁵⁹ Finally, the rebranded job titles also bring together an odd prestige that contrasts with the sense of earthy pride that prominent collectives used to share in factories. Beaud and Pialoux remark: 'Du temps où les "ouvriers Peugeot" constituaient un groupe fort (socialement et politiquement), respecté et envié (pour leurs salaires et les avantages liés à la grande entreprise) [...], ce n'était ni déchoir ni "rater" sa vie professionnelle que d'entrer et de finir à l'usine comme "simple ouvrier"'.¹⁶⁰

However, let's not be fooled by this poetic licence. As Marie Pezé rightly points out, 'Seul le discours du salarié sur la manière dont il travaille [...] lui permet de mettre à jour ce qu'est la réalité du travail.'¹⁶¹ Christophe Dejourné also defines the language in the workplace as a determinant medium insofar as it reflects, conveys and therefore makes possible sharing work-related experiences from an individual to a collective level, thus participating actively in the construction of collectives.¹⁶² Nevertheless the argument cuts both ways. The common trend in today's workplace is that the widening gap between the discourse of senior management and that of staff lies in the fact that within the managerial version of the company, work-related issues

¹⁵⁵ Maillet, F. (2015) 'Avec les caisses automatiques, l'emploi baisse, le stress monte', *L'Humanité* [online] 02 March. Available from: <http://www.humanite.fr/avec-les-caisses-automatiques-lemploi-baisse-le-stress-monte-566994> [Accessed 14 December 2015].

¹⁵⁶ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (Paris: Editions Stock).

¹⁵⁷ Voted by the Villepin conservative government, the CPE was an employment contract for employees under the age of 26 which gave employers the possibility to fire staff within a period of 2 years without providing any legal justification.

¹⁵⁸ *Les Internationalistes* (2006) 'La lutte contre le CPE' [online] Available from: <http://www.leftcom.org/fr/articles/2006-12-01/la-lutte-contre-le-cpe> [Accessed 23 January 2015].

¹⁵⁹ *Le Monde avec L'AFP & Reuters* (2006) 'La mobilisation contre le CPE atteint une ampleur inégalée', *Le Monde* [online] 27 March. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2006/03/27/la-mobilisation-contre-le-cpe-atteint-une-ampleur-inegalée_755248_3210.html [Accessed 23 January 2015].

¹⁶⁰ Beaud, S. & Pialoux, M. (1999) *Retour sur la condition ouvrière, Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard*, op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁶¹ Marie Pezé interviewed in *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré, op. cit.

¹⁶² Dejourné, C. (2000) *Travail: usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail*, op. cit., p. 238.

are scrapped.¹⁶³ Marie Petitcunéot states: 'Cet appauvrissement de la langue est une conséquence directe de l'aversion croissante aux risques. En employant toujours les mêmes mots et le même ton, les entreprises et les dirigeants se protègent les uns les autres. [...] La langue des entreprises est mourante parce qu'elle se réduit progressivement à n'être plus qu'un outil de gestion des risques.'¹⁶⁴ 'Ce qu'Herbert Marcuse (1972) appelait l'univers du discours clos qui se ferme à tout autre discours qui n'emploie pas ses termes.'¹⁶⁵

Therefore resisting or remaining impervious to such a discourse may bear consequences. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Marie-France Hirigoyen observes: 'Il faut donc, par un discours creux, hypnotiser les personnes, les mettre sous emprise. Les salariés n'ont aucun moyen de comprendre ce qui se dit et encore moins de le vérifier, ils ne peuvent que se soumettre [...] D'ailleurs, si le salarié résiste, ce discours se fait contraignant et menaçant, afin de susciter la peur et la soumission.'¹⁶⁶ If it is also true that the etymology of 'travail' comes from *trepalium* (or *tripalium*), an instrument of torture used by the Romans, let us bear in mind that this should be approached with caution and demystified insofar as 'ces raisonnements sur l'histoire des mots sont doublement frauduleux: ils tentent, d'une part, d'essentialiser une dimension de l'organisation sociale, pour mieux discréditer les idées progressistes. D'autre part, ils alimentent une idée reçue sur le langage, selon laquelle les sources anciennes des mots touchent à la "vérité" des choses.'¹⁶⁷

Thus, given that 'la limite entre ce qui est du management un peu dur et du harcèlement est devenue imprécise',¹⁶⁸ we will now seek to prove how such a phenomenon is linked to a rather specific, hegemonic and entrenched management culture in France. The disintegration of workers' collectives, restructurings, subcontracting, intensification of time constraints and of quality control checks have

¹⁶³ In *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) Directed by Jean-Robert Viallet [Documentary Film]. France: Yami 2 Productions, France 2.

¹⁶⁴ Petitcunéot, M. (2014) 'La langue morte des dirigeants', *Le Huffington Post* [online] 17 January. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/marie-petitcuenot/la-langue-morte-des-dirig_b_4608314.html?utm_hp_ref=france [Accessed 19 September 2014].

¹⁶⁵ De Gaulejac, V. (2009) *La société malade de la gestion*, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁶⁶ Hirigoyen, M-F. (1998) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, la violence perverse au quotidien* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 239.

¹⁶⁷ Flebas (2016) 'L'arnaque de l'étymologie du mot "travail"', *Mediapart* [online] 24 March. Available from: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/flebas/blog/240316/l-arnaque-de-l-etymologie-du-mot-travail> [Accessed 18 July 2016].

¹⁶⁸ Morice, L. (2014) 'Harcèlement moral au travail: "Il y a un retour en arrière"', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 17 February. Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/social/20140217.OBS6582/harcelement-moral-au-travail-il-y-a-un-retour-en-arriere.html> [Accessed 05 June 2016].

all contributed to influence and change the nature of bullying which has become more passive-aggressive and insidious. Most notably, the ongoing effort to assert and maintain managerial control has also modified its manifestations and the way the latter are addressed in the place of work.

Redefining bullying in today's French workplace

La défense des victimes du harcèlement prend le relais des luttes de la classe ouvrière dans une optique qui allie la psychologie, la morale et la loi. Pour beaucoup, cette défense rejoint le combat contre le capitalisme qui cherche à trouver un second souffle. (Jean-Pierre Le Goff (2009) 'Suicides au travail (France Télécom)', *France Catholique*, 18 September).

Historic setbacks and defeats in key industrial battles combined with the mutation of social democracy, the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the decline of class and exploitation have weakened trade unions' ability to wage significant large-scale struggles. In this new climate, trade unions have failed to engage with the everyday issues such as bullying hence further eroding their influence. Whether responsibility lies within the organisation or the individuals concerned, Dorothee Ramaut ascertains that: 'Toutes les études prouvent que c'est l'affaiblissement des solidarités collectives qui facilite l'accomplissement du processus de harcèlement moral.'¹⁶⁹ The same 'weakening of collective solidarities' has had a destabilising effect on class identity paralleled with the generalisation of mass individualism and the explosion of the service sector as outlined in the first section of this chapter. In this respect, Ramaut's analysis is also significant as it allows bullying to be addressed and tackled from a more qualitative and socio-economic approach.

In *Retour sur la condition ouvrière* (1999), Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux also explore the mechanisms of the weakening of collective solidarities and the consequences of this phenomenon on members of the working class.¹⁷⁰ Their goal is to comprehend the status as well as the future of the 'ouvriers après la classe ouvrière', which was the original title of the book. They detail the processes by which collective solidarities are undermined. They observe that the working class is completely ignored in today's societal and social representations. It is also victimised, given that it only makes headlines when restructurings occur, or criminalised when warehouses are vandalised and employers sequestered. Workers mainly come to existence when they lose their jobs, are ill-treated or organise radical actions such as

¹⁶⁹ Ramaut, D. (2006) *Journal d'un médecin* (Paris: Editions du Cherche Midi), p. 84.

¹⁷⁰ Beaud, S. & Pialoux, M. (1999) *Retour sur la condition ouvrière, Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard*, op. cit.

physically confronting CEOs as was the case with two of the top leaders of Air France, an event that was profusely and biasedly reported in the international press.¹⁷¹ (This expression of radicalism is pushed to its limits in the comedy film *Louise-Michel* (2008) in Section Two of Chapter Three.)¹⁷² This illustrates that successive strategies of compromise and unaddressed issues, among them bullying, have proved to be inadequate. As Laïla Salah-Eddine writes:

Ainsi, l'émergence du harcèlement moral est le produit d'une nouvelle configuration sémantique dépolitisée où le modèle bourreau/victime relaie le registre de la lutte des classes, où la psychologie et la morale prédominent sur l'analyse économique et sociale. Le langage marxiste et militant a laissé la place au langage individuel de l'ordre de la victimisation [...].¹⁷³

In all reality, one notices that the employees are not referred to as exploited but as victims or patients (after diagnosis) or plaintiffs, which makes the possibility of challenging the inherent dysfunctions of companies problematic from a class perspective. By substituting the word 'exploited' with that of 'patients', the Marxian notion of social and class struggle as we know it switches to uncharted ideological territory, 'une véritable psychiatrisation du social'.¹⁷⁴

In France, a majority of these cases end up being processed through the judicial system: the aforementioned *conseils de prud'hommes* (which have ceased to be free of charge since October 2011) for the employees from the private sector, or *le tribunal administratif* for the employees working in the public sector (both elected industrial tribunals). Yet if their role can still be salutary for the plaintiff despite the length of legal procedures, the number of disputes keeps rising. It is also worth noting that the labour inspectors' working conditions are deteriorating because of the lack of material means.¹⁷⁵ Somehow, referring a case to those tribunals has the perverse effect of externalizing the issue that is bound to affect other members of staff more reluctant to fight back (as outlined in the numerous cases explored in Section Three of Chapter

¹⁷¹ Maligorne, C. & Brigand, M. (2015) 'Air France: l'agression des dirigeants fait la une de la presse internationale', *Le Figaro* [online] 06 October. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/societes/2015/10/05/20005-20151005ARTFIG00392-la-colere-des-salaries-d-air-france-interpelle-la-presse-anglo-saxone.php> [Accessed 21 December 2012].

¹⁷² *Louise-Michel* (2008) Directed by Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern [Film]. France: MNP Entreprise et Arte France cinéma.

¹⁷³ Salah-Eddine, L. (2008) 'Le harcèlement moral au travail: analyse sociologique'. Available from: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00343544/document> (p. 277) [online] 01 December. [Accessed 16 May 2016] op. cit.

¹⁷⁴ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), p. 163.

¹⁷⁵ Laffargue, O. (2011) '"Martyrisée", l'inspection du travail au bord de la crise', *Rue89* [online] 10 August. Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-economie/20110810.RUE3721/martyrisee-l-inspection-du-travail-au-bord-de-la-crise.html> [Accessed 10 August 2011].

Two). Philippe Askenazy highlights this issue by stating: ‘En France, on estime à 4000 le nombre de psys qui officieraient au service des entreprises, non pour suggérer des améliorations des conditions de travail, mais pour apprendre aux salariés comment survivre au stress et à la pression, et garantir ainsi une plus grande productivité de l’employeur.’¹⁷⁶

Marie-France Hirigoyen ‘s insights into ‘le harcèlement moral’

Considered a trans-national phenomenon, workplace bullying has always been part of capitalism.¹⁷⁷ However, according to Marie-France Hirigoyen, it is identified and tackled in different ways from one country to another. She observes that France has lagged behind her European counterparts: ‘Dans d’autres pays, tels que l’Allemagne ou les pays nordiques, la vigilance sur les conditions de travail est plus ancienne et donc la prise de conscience de la violence y est plus précoce. Dans ces pays, le taux de syndicalisation est élevé, et l’approche des problèmes est collective.’¹⁷⁸ When she published *Le harcèlement moral, la violence perverse au quotidien* in 1998, it started a national debate and psychological violence turned out to become an issue no one could any longer ignore or dismiss as peripheral. With the participation of the media which ambiguously sensationalised it as if they had all of a sudden come across a new phenomenon to exploit, a law was voted under the Jospin government (1997-2002) to ensure the protection of workers and employees who considered themselves victims of bullying.¹⁷⁹ The seminal book which addressed the matter with great honesty became the victim of its own success. This led to a series of misinterpretations and thorny situations, e.g. managers considering themselves bullied by trade unionists and consequently taking legal action against them, thus linking militant action to crime.¹⁸⁰ These are the reasons why three years later Dr Hirigoyen published *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux* (2001), in which she is keen to make a clear distinction between bullying, mobbing

¹⁷⁶ Askenazy, P. (2004) *Les désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁷⁷ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2011) *Le harcèlement moral, dans le contexte du travail, est-il une spécificité française ou est-il partagé avec d’autres pays ?* Dailymotion [online video] Available from: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xjlmvv_hirigoyen-q4_webcam [Accessed 29 June 2012].

¹⁷⁸ Hirigoyen, M-F. (1998) *Le harcèlement moral, la violence perverse au quotidien*, op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Aucun salarié ne doit subir des agissements répétés de harcèlement moral qui ont pour objet ou pour effet une dégradation des conditions de travail susceptible de porter atteinte à ses droits et à sa dignité, d’altérer sa santé physique ou mentale ou de compromettre son avenir professionnel.’ (Article L 122-49 du Code du travail, 17.01.2002).

¹⁸⁰ Askenazy, P. (2004) *Les désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme*, op. cit., p. 40.

(Leymann: 1996) and other forms of aggressive behaviour such as ‘managerial abuse’.¹⁸¹ In 2008, adjustments were implemented to reinforce the law and extend the legal regime in favour of the victims in the workplace.¹⁸² Such a legal gain, on the other hand, gave way to confusion and exaggeration concerning the interpretation of the law vis-à-vis of the terminology of words, e.g. ‘stress’, ‘pressure’, ‘occasional conflicts’ or ‘intimidation attempts’, as their nuances in terms of meaning should be considered with great care, as laid out in the table below.

Generic differences in terms of clarification¹⁸³

Conflit normal	Situations de harcèlement moral
Rôles et tâches clairement définis	Rôle ambigu
Relations de collaboration	Comportement peu coopératif/boycott
Objectifs communs	Absence de prévision
Relations interpersonnelles sans équivoque	Relations interpersonnelles ambiguës
Organisation saine	Défaillance de l’organisation
Affrontements et bagarres occasionnels	Agissements contraires à l’éthique durables et systématiques
Stratégies franches et ouvertes	Stratégies équivoques
Conflit ouvert et discussion franche	Agissements cachés et absence de conflit
Communication directe	Communication indirecte et évasive

There have been numerous studies and publications that share the same approach and offer solutions since bullying is now officially identified as totally reprehensible and bullies liable to prosecution. Proven guilty, the latter could be liable to a fine of €15,000 and up to a year of imprisonment.¹⁸⁴ ‘En France, chaque année, il est reporté que 2 millions d’employés souffrent de harcèlement ou d’abus physiques.’¹⁸⁵ Thus, some categories of workers are more likely to be bullied than others, e.g. sick and

¹⁸¹ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 353.

¹⁸² Cousin, C. & Lopez, J. (2009) ‘Harcèlement moral: le management en prend pour son grade’, *L’Express* [online] 26 November. Available from: http://lentreprise.lexpress.fr/rh-management/droit-travail/harcelement-moral-le-management-en-prend-pour-son-grade_1519064.html [Accessed 13 September 2014].

¹⁸³ *Série protection de la santé des travailleurs n° 4* (2004) ‘Qu’est-ce que le harcèlement moral sur le lieu de travail ?’, (p. 15). *Organisation mondiale de la santé* [online]. Available from: http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/en/pwh4f.pdf [Accessed 13 September 2014].

¹⁸⁴ Lailler, N. (2012) ‘Quand les employeurs sont condamnés pénalement pour harcèlement moral’, *JuriTravail.com* [online] 18 June. Available from: <http://www.juritruavail.com/Actualite/harcelement-moral-sexuel-discrimination/Id/16434> [Accessed 13 September 2014].

¹⁸⁵ *J’ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré, op. cit.

disabled, older, ethnic-minorities, homosexuals, bisexuals and women.¹⁸⁶ Despite the implementation of new legislation, some of those victims still find it daunting to address the issue as related taboos and fear of losing their jobs or being labelled as weak and unfit might prevail when the word is released.¹⁸⁷

Should bullying be considered a direct consequence of the neo-liberal transformations affecting modern-day workplaces? Confronting it precisely challenges these transformations. Yet, organised collective grievances channelled by bold and influential unions which have improved workers' working conditions since the beginning of the 20th century have significantly declined in terms of membership as highlighted in Section One. The question is whether the mushrooming of abuses and unethical treatment could certainly be dealt with if unions regain a stronger membership combined with a new approach vis-à-vis bullying. This would give armour to workers somewhat subjugated by the passive-aggressive strategies of management teams.

As a matter of fact, up until the mid-1990s in France, bullying cases were perceived as only concerning the private sphere and hastily labelled as 'conflicts of personalities' that were not compatible with union representatives' scope of expertise and role. In short, being exploited was a political issue whereas being bullied was an ethical and psychological one. As they would involve workers at a more individual and personal level, such cases were merely labelled as petty bourgeois matters, or even taboo among the collectives' culture. This is one of the criticisms expressed by Christophe Dejours who observes that the unions were mainly focused on socio-economic matters at the detriment of those involving a more individual and psychological approach. He observes: 'Dans les années soixante-dix, aussi bien les organisations syndicales majoritaires que les organisations gauchistes ont refusé de prendre en considération les questions relatives à la subjectivité dans le travail.'¹⁸⁸ Such a claim is corroborated by Marie-France Hirigoyen when she states that out of 40% of bullied employees who have sought help from a union, only 10% received

¹⁸⁶ See Fevre, R., Lewis, D., Robinson, A. & Jones, T. (2012) *Trouble at Work* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc).

¹⁸⁷ *Syndicat National des Enseignements du Second degré* (2014) 'Harcèlement: lever un tabou', SNES [online] 04 October. Available from: <http://www.aix.snes.edu/spip.php?article1543> [Accessed 25 December 2015].

¹⁸⁸ Dejours, C. (1998) *Souffrance en France. La banalisation de l'injustice sociale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 47.

any.¹⁸⁹ Bullying was thus a collateral issue the unions were reluctant to tackle as it was not considered a core social claim in factories and offices' predominant male culture. One shall also assume that in cases of 'horizontal bullying', the high possibility that the bully is also a member of the same union as the bullied puts the organisation in an awkward position as its role is to protect both parties' interests. In addition, dealing with such cases would put claimants in an awkward position vis-à-vis their own team. This sensitive issue is addressed in Philippe Le Guay's long feature *Trois Huit* (2001) in Section One of Chapter Three.¹⁹⁰ The involvement of a third party is therefore indispensable. Meanwhile, if unions don't address these issues systematically, the role of any whistleblower can take over, which leaves in turn the latter with no protection.¹⁹¹ Thus whistleblowing corroborates the decline of older forms of resistance whilst giving new agendas a substitute.

Interestingly, according to Hirigoyen, '[...] s'il y a harcèlement moral, c'est que justement aucun conflit n'a pu se mettre en place.'¹⁹² One may wonder whether impeding social conflicts that occur could impact on the increase of cases of bullying as well. In too many workplaces, most cases are still treated as exceptional situations, which has the advantage of not incriminating the companies and the management. Both are keen to sustain a positive projection of their corporate image therefore sweeping under the carpet any conflictual situation. On the other hand, psychologist Marie Pezé stresses the fact that prescriptive work has asphyxiated the part of freedom which is intrinsic and vital to any professional activity performed by a human being. She concludes: 'Il ne reste plus que la conflictualisation.'¹⁹³

Furthermore, to what extent can today's unstable and over-pressurised working environment be held responsible for being a breeding ground for bullying? Is bullying in the French workplace on the rise due to the reasons explained in this chapter (deunionisation, increasing job precariousness, competitiveness and individualisation) or is it because an increased awareness of the phenomenon gives such an impression? It is possible that when a set of measures of protection becomes law, it may be

¹⁸⁹ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 359.

¹⁹⁰ *Trois Huit* (2001) Directed by Philippe Le Guay [film] op. cit.

¹⁹¹ In Moreau, V. (2014) 'Ils ont été lanceurs d'alerte et ils ont tout perdu', *Radio France International* [online] 03 June. Available from: http://www.rfi.fr/france/20140603-ils-ont-ete-lanceurs-alerte-ils-ont-tout-perdu/#./?&_suid=141232572335104456257053834683 [Accessed 28 September 2014].

¹⁹² Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁹³ Marie Pezé in *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré [Documentary Film] op. cit.

followed by a recrudescence of ‘pending’ cases that become visible all at once; a phenomenon certainly amplified by media coverage. Such a perception has to be put to the test by long-term studies in order to be verified. Thus, tackling any case of bullying without attempting to link it with the organisation and its potential malfunctions might be missing the whole point. Numerous sectors are subjected to an endemic process of servicization and of proletarianization of their workforce. As Vincent de Gaulejac sums up: ‘[...] le management dans son ensemble, et l’ensemble de la population d’une certaine façon, a accepté cette folie du capitalisme financier qui fait que des actionnaires qui ne sont plus branchés sur la production exigent des taux de rentabilité sans se préoccuper du tout du réel du travail et des conditions concrètes qui permettent cette rentabilité.’¹⁹⁴ The authoritarian approach taken by management to nip conflictual situations in the bud gives practices of bullying a justification.¹⁹⁵ Subtle, insidious forms of control derived from Toyotism produce the same effect as overt bullying. Every case should raise questions on the way organisations are run and transformed. In this respect, Hirigoyen compares both traditional and contemporary systems of management and concludes: ‘Dans une organisation plus traditionnelle, plus répressive, on verra davantage de conflits directs, alors que les conflits plus intériorisés et le harcèlement moral se rencontreront plus dans les types de management participatif et libéral, jouant sur la séduction et l’adhésion aux valeurs.’¹⁹⁶ If business ethics is therefore presented as a fundamental aspect of management, it is nonetheless a new form of control.

Nowadays, the worker’s isolation does not escape management structures whose strategy is to exploit this social flaw in order to consolidate their ascendancy. In the new organisation, the power struggle has turned one-sided due to the elusive methods of control which subtly target each worker.¹⁹⁷ Such practices are not new but these organisations use more passive-aggressive methods of control on staff as they have become less accountable.¹⁹⁸ The truth is that companies’ functioning can generate a whole range of aggressiveness, violence, apathy or obsessive control passed on and internalized at various degrees by some of the employees. Workplaces within which

¹⁹⁴ In *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) Directed by Jean-Robert Viallet [Documentary Film] Part Three, op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ See Barbier, D. (2009) *La Fabrique de l’homme pervers* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob).

¹⁹⁶ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 238.

¹⁹⁷ See Du Roy, I. (2009) *Orange Stressé* (Paris: Editions La Découverte).

¹⁹⁸ Jones, O. (2011) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, op., cit., p. 147.

individuals start to turn against each other when transformations occur should be carefully scrutinised. De Gaulejac remarks:

La majorité des employés se sentent individuellement harcelés parce qu'ils sont collectivement soumis à une pression intense. Mais faute de pouvoir intervenir sur les méfaits de l'organisation du travail, ils s'agressent entre eux, jusqu'à s'en prendre à eux-mêmes, comme dans les expériences d'Henri Laborit. Lorsqu'un rat enfermé dans une cage reçoit une décharge électrique, il agresse son "collègue". S'il est seul, il développe des troubles psychosomatiques (Laborit, 1999).¹⁹⁹

Since the mid-1980s, the continuous internalization of the turnover and dividends of companies as the only worthy parameters for shareholders, combined with the redefinition of discipline and hierarchy by management teams have created a divisive and impassable gulf between the different parties. Communication has been broken. When management teams' goal is to make limitless profit regardless of any other consideration, the cases of bullying at the workplace rise. According to the French association HMS,²⁰⁰ companies that need to axe personnel do not hesitate to use bullying as a strategy to force people to resign so that the former avoid costs that a planned redundancy scheme would legally involve (a managerial practice fictionalised in the film *De gré ou de force* (1998)²⁰¹ – see Section Three of Chapter Three). The study is based on 1235 cases HMS processed between September and December 2008.²⁰² Isabelle de Foucaud writes:

Plus d'un salarié sur cinq (21,7%) se disait victime d'au moins "un comportement hostile au travail" en 2010, selon la dernière enquête Sumer réalisée par des médecins du travail. Ils étaient un sur six (16,3%) en 2003. 'Dans un contexte de chômage actuel, qui empêche les salariés de quitter leur entreprise, ces agissements risquent de prendre encore plus d'ampleur', prédit l'avocate, qui constate, en outre, l'émergence de nouvelles formes de harcèlement. Selon elle, les "licenciements montés" auraient ainsi explosé ces dernières années.²⁰³

Not only does the graph below show that about 10% of the working population is subjected to bullying, but it also reveals that different forms of violence co-exist and affect a significant number of individuals.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ De Gaulejac, V. (2009) *La société malade de la gestion*, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

²⁰⁰ *Harcèlement Moral Stop* (association type loi 1901 created in March 1999).

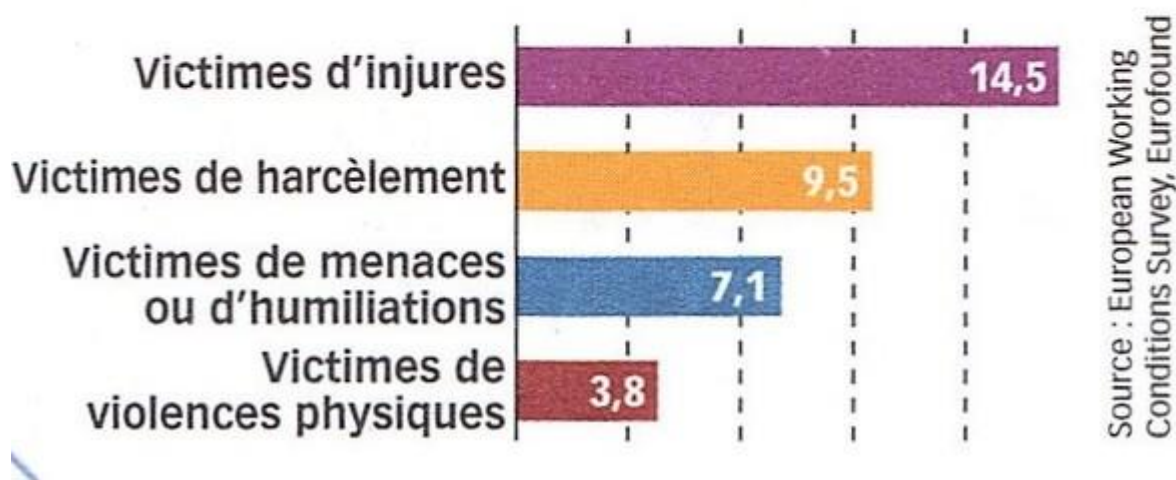
²⁰¹ *De gré ou de force* (1998) Directed by Fabrice Cazeneuve [Film]. France: Anabase Production, France 2, Groupe Expand Images.

²⁰² Servenay, D. (2009) 'Du harcèlement moral stratégique pour virer facile', *Rue89* [online] 12 February. Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-economie/20090212.RUE8361/du-harcèlement-moral-strategique-pour-virer-facile.html> [Accessed 12 July 2010].

²⁰³ De Foucaud, I. (2012) 'Le harcèlement au travail a été facilité par la crise', *Le Figaro* [online] 05 July. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/social/2012/07/05/09010-20120705ARTFIG00570-le-harcèlement-au-travail-a-ete-facilite-par-la-crise.php> [Accessed 15 November 2014].

²⁰⁴ *European Working Conditions Survey* (2010) 'Part des personnes en emploi en France se déclarant en 2010 victimes de violences au travail', *Eurofound* [online]. [Accessed 30 July 2011].

Part des personnes en emploi en France se déclarant en 2010 victimes de violences au travail dans le mois précédant l'enquête, en %



On the other hand, by narrowing down the identification of some bullies as 'pervers narcissiques', Marie-France Hirigoyen also observes that the cause-effect relationship between the two is not systematic. It is not always possible to 'déresponsabiliser les personnes en incriminant le profit lié au capitalisme et à la mondialisation'. Her conclusion allows mainly a psychological approach to protect the victim. The issue in this case is defined by 'une dimension psychologique fondamentale, la pulsion d'emprise qui amène les individus à contrôler l'autre et à vouloir l'asservir'.²⁰⁵ Thus, the expression 'narcissistic pervert' may have gained in notoriety thanks to abundant literature (for instance in Delphine de Vigan's novel *Les Heures souterraines* (2009), explored in Section Two of Chapter Four),²⁰⁶ TV and radio programmes, seminars and blogs on the topic, but has in return suffered in terms of a clear-cut definition. Its excessive banalisation gives the impression that half of the population is a victim of the other half. All the more so as 'se poser en victime, ça peut être aussi un comportement pervers en soi'.²⁰⁷ Some go even further by questioning the very existence of the 'narcissistic pervert' which might just be a convenient mythical construction or an imaginary scapegoat to justify our personal

²⁰⁵ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 153.

²⁰⁶ De Vigan, D. (2009) *Les Heures souterraines* (Paris: Editions Jean-Claude Lattès).

²⁰⁷ Erner, G. (2013) 'Le pervers narcissique existe-t-il vraiment?', *France Inter* [online] 02 October. Available from: <http://www.franceinter.fr/player/reecouter?play=731172> [Accessed 28 October 2013].

weaknesses and failures. Understanding the causes of a bullying situation remains a challenge even for specialists.²⁰⁸

There is a life before and after being bullied. It is commonplace that the victim experiences symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, is subjected to relapses triggered by an acute sense of unpalatable apprehension which can resurface in the midst of common situations that are not necessarily stressful per se.²⁰⁹ Neo-liberal transformations tipping towards an increasingly Toyotist economy, interpersonal conflicts, individuals with psychopathic propensity and code of silence surrounding the victim, all mean that the debate is far from over. The truth is that numerous cases are often interconnected with a broader and negative social-economic context that acts like a trigger, thus overwhelming the individuals involved. Last but not least, for every single reported case within an organisation, how many others are not being known or hushed up? All in all, bullying is often used as the last resort when all the other means of control have failed. This substantiates the fact that neo-managerialism has not won. If this was not the case, bullying would not exist anymore.

Conclusion of Chapter One

Chapter One of this thesis has assessed patterns of control and their empirical effects on today's workplace. From aspects of the Toyotist model to that of a chameleon language used by management, it has examined modern forms of precarity and insecurity. It has highlighted that behind the new modes of production and the jargon utilised lies a strategy to destabilise in an innocuous fashion the iconic social landmarks of the labouring classes. Finally, it has outlined that there is a social significance in identifying and recognising bullying as a consequence of deunionisation and political disengagement and that an increase of reported cases suggests that it is being tackled in French companies as protection laws for the workers have been implemented and reinforced since the 2000s.

Moving forward, and with the intention of exploiting the thematics outlined, we shall now explore the ways in which different genres within cultural production engage with and address new patterns of control and resistance in the workplace

²⁰⁸ See Sanguet, M. (2016) *Le pervers n'est pas celui qu'on croit* (Paris: Editions Eyrolles).

²⁰⁹ Matthiesen, S B. & Einarsen, S. (2004) 'Psychiatric distress and symptoms of PTSD among victims of bullying at work', *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, Vol. 32, n°3 [online] August Edition. Available from: <http://www.uib.no/People/pspsm/documents/Bullying-PTSD-2004-Matthiesen-Einarsen.pdf> [Accessed 16 September 2011].

through case studies in documentary films (Chapter Two) and characterisation and plot-line in fiction films and novels (Chapters Three and Four respectively).

For many of the film directors and writers in question, the effects of globalisation as illustrated in the previous chapter are the key focus of their enquiries into the present-day experiences of employees (job insecurity and degradation, unfair treatment and job loss). By documenting social change within the workplace, their films and writings outline a strong suspicion of the politics of resignation, which are at the same time inherent in the storylines and characters involved. They also demonstrate that the transformations induced by neo-liberalism have met fragmented resistance since the post-May 68 era and that these transformations are precisely the counterpoint against which film-makers and writers are united. Whether they disturb or enchant, despair or give hope, by holding up a mirror to the face of neo-liberalism their contribution is to inform and to educate on how workers conceive ways to resist, with the understanding that their audience are also workers in their own right and vice versa. This may either disappoint by its modest impact or galvanise and gratify them in terms of political praxis and social significance but either way, Theodor Adorno observes that, '[l]'art ne consiste pas à mettre en avant des alternatives, mais à résister, par la forme et rien d'autre, contre le cours du monde qui continue de menacer les hommes comme un pistolet appuyé contre leur poitrine.'²¹⁰

We shall now outline the origin and appropriateness of the terminology employed in the following chapters whilst evaluating their currency and derivation.

The expression *cinéma du labeur* is first coined by Sonya Faure in an article published in *Libération* newspaper in February 2006. Whilst stating that '[l]e travail est de retour sur grands écrans. Fini les aventures collectives chères aux années 70, aujourd'hui, ce sont les batailles individuelles et leur lot de souffrances qui inspirent les réalisateurs.'²¹¹, Faure observes that if work-related issues are back on big screens, they are subjected to a process of dissemination by also being addressed in TV documentaries, novels and plays. She backdates the return of *cinéma du labeur* to the mid-1990s, citing *En avoir ou pas* by Laetitia Masson (1995) and *Marius et Jeannette* by Robert Guédiguian (1997) as seminal films.²¹² Despite the numerous divergences

²¹⁰ Adorno, T. (1999) *Notes sur la littérature* (Paris: Editions Champs Flammarion), p. 289.

²¹¹ Faure, S. (2006) 'Cinéma du labeur', *Libération* [online] 13 February. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2006/02/13/cinema-du-labeur_29771 [Accessed 20 March 2018]

²¹² *En avoir ou pas* (1995) Directed by Laetitia Masson [Film]. France: UFD - UGC Fox Distribution; *Marius et Jeannette* (1997) Directed by Robert Guédiguian [Film]. France: Diaphana Films.

of the political, social and economic contexts, she reconnects that decade with the 1970s. It is indeed a ‘return’ but a rather different one insofar as the centrality of ‘the great collective adventures’ of the 1970s have shifted towards a new focus, that of ‘petites souffrances’, whilst a critique of neo-liberalism remains prevalent in both periods. Rightly so, the recurrence of atomised suffering in literature and film has become preponderant, inspiring the many (viewers and readers) whilst having the capacity to damage corporate image. In point of fact, whistleblowing has clearly emerged as a new and effective sub-genre to measure, if only hypothetically, the extent of the socio-political effectiveness of the films and texts explored. Derived from individual forms of resistance that have gained momentum since the mid-1990s, whistleblowing will be analysed and exemplified throughout the subsequent chapters, e.g. notably in Ruffin’s documentary film *Merci patron!*²¹³ (see Section Three of Chapter Two) and Anna Sam’s novel *Les Tribulations d’une caissière*²¹⁴ (see Section Four of Chapter Four).

Faure writes off the 1980s as a decade of cinematic wilderness characterised by a vacuum of social issues and perspectives in film. In the same article, she cites Tangui Perron who bluntly considers that ‘[i]l y a eu un trou noir dans le cinéma des années 80 et 90’. Perron justifies his own observation by stating that ‘le travail est antinarratif. Il est répétitif, alors que la fiction nécessite des rebondissements’.²¹⁵ However, we may argue that the incompatibility between work-related themes and fiction has had to be reassessed insofar as in the majority of fiction films released in the 2000s and explored in Chapter Three, e.g. Costa-Gavras’ *Le Couperet* (2005) and Fabienne Godet’s *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (2006), work and the workplace are extensively used as key elements within the plots as well as the focal points for numerous twists, which contributes to their rehabilitation and appeal.

At this point, I wondered whether the hegemony of *cinéma du look* and its entertaining vacuous characters had overshadowed a different breed of fiction films that was marginalised during the Mitterrand years (see the introduction of Chapter Three). Agnès Varda’s realism in the tragic *Sans toit ni loi* (1985) featuring Sandrine Bonnaire as a vagabond might therefore be the exception that confirmed the trend. With regard to workplace-related issues in the documentary film genre during the

²¹³ *Merci patron!* (2016) Directed by François Ruffin [Documentary Film]. France: Jour2fête.

²¹⁴ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d’une caissière*, op. cit.

²¹⁵ In Faure, S. (2006) ‘Cinéma du labeur’, *Libération* [online] 13 February. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2006/02/13/cinema-du-labeur_29771 [Accessed 20 March 2018].

1980s, I also contemplated the possibility that Jean-Louis Le Tacon's *Cochon qui s'en dédit* released in 1979²¹⁶ (see Section One of Chapter Two) could be the perfect bridge between the 1970s and the 1980s. It was however its culmination. Thus, my research proved to be inconclusive and there was indeed a 'black hole' for fiction and documentary films during that period. As for literature, I was also unable to establish a continuity from the late 1970s to the present day, with the notable exception of the publications of François Bon's *Sortie d'usine* and Leslie Kaplan's *L'excès-l'usine* in 1982.²¹⁷ Finally, privileging the expression *littérature du labeur* to that of *romans d'entreprise* (see Chapter Four) allowed me to unlock the genre, to define sub-genres and to explore and put together a more eclectic choice of novels through several decades. In my view, it gives a broader, more inclusive and less compartmentalised vision than the commonly 'branded' yet reductive designation of *romans d'entreprise* (see Section One of Chapter Four).

As for cinema alone, and in varying degrees, authors such as Charles Drazin, Julie Esparbes, Elisabeth Ezra and Martin O'Shaughnessy have examined directors and key films and offered useful insights into how inequalities are tackled in contemporary French film.²¹⁸ However not all research in this field shows that there is a shared consensus built around the anti-capitalist, anti-globalist and critical stance of this form of 'made in France' cinema. The validity of a genre entangled in its own contradictions is questioned by François Garçon:

La dénonciation du capitalisme dans le septième art français est ancienne. Mais depuis le tournant des années 2000, elle tend à se renforcer sous les effets de plus en plus visibles du chômage et de la mondialisation de l'économie, avec un succès critique et public croissant. Le cinéma serait ainsi le reflet d'une "gauchisation" de la société française. Et si, au contraire, cette "certaine tendance du cinéma français" n'était que le miroir des conditions de production de ce secteur: une activité culturelle assistée, archi-protégée des lois du marché, pouvant se permettre de méconnaître le système qu'elle ne cesse de dénoncer ?²¹⁹

In line with this observation, whether the committed artform is overprotected by the laws of the market does not contradict the scope of this thesis whose main

²¹⁶ *Cochon qui s'en dédit* (1979) Directed by Jean-Louis Le Tacon [Documentary Film]. France: Les Films Grain de Sable.

²¹⁷ Bon, F. (1982) *Sortie d'usine* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit); Kaplan, L. (1982) *L'excès-l'usine* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

²¹⁸ Drazin C. (2011) *The Faber Book of French Cinema* (London: Faber & Faber); Ezra, E. (2004) *European Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books).

²¹⁹ Garçon, F. (2017) 'La France pratique un kynésianisme frénétique dans le secteur cinématographique', *L'Opinion* [online] 11 January. Available from: <http://www.lopinion.fr/edition/economie/francois-garcon-france-pratique-keynesianisme-frenetique-dans-secteur-117984> [Accessed 17 April 2017].

argument is to establish that there is a wider social significance linking all these fragmented works. However, Garçon's viewpoint may not apply to all films within the genre. To give an example, Jean-Paul Lilienfeld's *La Journée de la jupe* (explored in Section Two of Chapter Three) was initially produced for television due to a limited budget however following public demand was later shown in an increasing number of cinemas nationwide.²²⁰

Some of these works are precisely inspirational by emboldening resilience and promoting solidarity and shared values that have the power to challenge any 'globalised' workplace. They represent an opportunity to objectivise solitude and suffering. More importantly, they assuage the fears of those who assumed that politics is outdated and irrelevant. In this respect, each protagonist tells a unique story about the workplace, offering the reader and the viewer a small fragment of insight instead of a grand solution. A rethink of the workplace also goes along with that of literature and cinema. The use of constitutive elements specific to control and resistance against the backdrop of globalisation will be extracted and systematically used for hermeneutics and analysis. As Eric Rohmer states: 'L'art est d'une époque non le reflet figé, mais le remède le plus efficace à opposer aux tares de celle-ci.'²²¹ As a matter of fact, the birth of *cinéma du labeur* co-exists with that of cinema. In 1895, Louis Lumière created two short documentary films, *Sortie de l'usine* and *Les Forgerons*, both of which were the first examples of the genre.²²² It can therefore be argued that the subject matter has always co-existed within this medium in one form or another.

As for the historical influences and contours of *littérature du labeur*, which could be identified as a 'neo-committed' literature, they can be linked to earlier forms of *littérature engagée* that appeared during the 15th century in France. For instance, the use of the invective (la vituperatio) by Alain Chartier and Christine de Pisan is directly influenced by Aristotle's postulate: 'Dire, c'est faire'.²²³ During the 16th century, Montaigne and Rabelais are both inclined to put in writing their reflections

²²⁰ *La Journée de la jupe* (2009) Directed by Jean-Paul Lilienfeld [Film]. France: Rezo Films.

²²¹ Vidal, M. (1977) *Les Contes moraux d'Eric Rohmer* (Paris: Pierre L'Herminier Editeur), p. 22.

²²² Institut Lumière. 'La première séance payante' [official website]. Available from: <http://www.institut-lumiere.org/musee/les-freres-lumiere-et-leurs-inventions/premiere-seance.html> [Accessed 09 July 2017].

²²³ Mühlethaler, J-C. (2006) 'Une génération d'écrivains "embarqués": le règne de Charles VI ou la naissance de l'engagement littéraire en France'. In: Kaempfer J., Florey S. & Meizoz, J., (eds.) *Formes de l'engagement littéraire (XVe–XXIe siècle)* (Lausanne: Antipodes), pp. 15-32.

and criticism of the idle classes within the French and European courts. Jean de la Fontaine's fables and Molière's comedies then dominate the following century, using parody as a diplomatic key element for implicit class critique. The trend continues throughout the 18th century, characterised by the period of Enlightenment, especially with Montesquieu's and Voltaire's works based on the questioning of religion and social order. The conclusion of *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (Voltaire, 1759) is unequivocal insofar as it highlights the fundamental value of work:

Vous devez avoir, dit Candide au Turc, une vaste et magnifique terre? – Je n'ai que vingt arpents, répondit le Turc; je les cultive avec mes enfants; le travail éloigne de nous trois grands maux: l'ennui, le vice et le besoin. [...] – Je sais aussi, dit Candide, qu'il faut cultiver notre jardin. – Vous avez raison, dit Pangloss; car quand l'homme fut mis dans le jardin d'Eden, il y fut mis *ut operaretur eum*, pour qu'il travaillât; ce qui prouve que l'homme n'est pas né pour le repos. – Travaillons sans raisonner, dit Martin; c'est le seul moyen de rendre la vie supportable.²²⁴

The genre gains momentum during the industrial revolution of the 19th century with the likes of Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant and Victor Hugo for whom the workplace starts to represent a worthy storyline with the emergence of the proletarian novel in which the centrality of the labouring classes is narratively established. In the interwar period, the factory's daily life is finally explored from the workers' specific viewpoint in writings such as Albert Soullillou's *Les Temps promis*.²²⁵ Simone Weil also investigates the workplace in *Le Journal d'usine* which is based on her own work experience in factories of Alsthom and Renault.²²⁶

In *Le témoignage de Simone Weil, l'expérience de l'usine*, Nadia Taïbi proposes an insightful comparative analysis on the similarities and differences between the text and Robert Linhart's *L'Etabli* (1978).²²⁷ The main difference concerns the writers' motives. Weil's work is that of a single individual whose primary initiative is to become the essence of the exploited class even if she wishes to 'déposer son âme, en entrant avec sa carte de pointage, et la reprendre intacte à la sortie!'²²⁸ Her journal is not meant to be published. Inversely, Linhart's work emerges from a collective political project known as *le mouvement des établis*, an initiative from *la Gauche prolétarienne*, which is designed to be read and disseminated. *L'Etabli* is explored in Section One of Chapter Four. Finally, Jean-Paul Sartre invents the designation and

²²⁴ Voltaire (1759) *Candide, ou l'Optimisme*, p. 43 [online]. Available from: <http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/docentes/rmonteiro/pdf/Candide.pdf> [Accessed 12 July 2017].

²²⁵ Soullillou, A. (1934) *Les Temps promis* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

²²⁶ Weil, S. (1934) *Le Journal d'usine* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

²²⁷ Taïbi, N. (2006) 'Le témoignage de Simone Weil, l'expérience de l'usine', in *L'engagement. Sens-Dessous* (pp. 62-75) [online] January Edition. Available from: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-sens-dessous-2006-1-page-62.htm> [Accessed 22 July 2017].

²²⁸ Weil, S. (1934) *Le Journal d'usine*, op. cit., p. 335.

gives it the legitimacy of a collective artistic force (from Camus to Malraux). The influence of the resistance movement during the Second World War is also undeniable. The Existentialist writer's imperative political responsibility and free will is to educate the reader throughout their *romans engagés*.²²⁹ Nevertheless the matter remains a cause for on-going reinterpretation.²³⁰

Committed literature has always been and still is a 'work in progress', which we shall posit here as being its *raison d'être*. Furthermore does their initiative corroborate Raymond Williams' viewpoint for whom, 'most writing, in any period, including our own, is a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture.'²³¹ Such paradoxical issues will also be examined. Defining the role of the novel against the backdrop of neo-liberalism, Gérard Mordillat states that, '[l]e roman est sûrement le plus grand espace de liberté dans la création contemporaine. Or sa fonction, c'est de montrer le réel. Comme disait Lacan: "Le réel, c'est ce qui ne va pas." C'est une bonne chose que les écrivains aient un nouvel ennemi, maintenant que la sempiternelle dénonciation du moralisme sexuel ne remue plus personne.'²³² Building on the Bourdieusian view that the 'little' miseries within society are revelatory of a 'great' neo-liberal misery, we will explore a selection of key films and writings that assert the social significance of fragmented resistance in spite of control and exploitation within the workplace.²³³ As the risk of becoming inured to social injustice and unfair treatment persists, we shall examine how a cinema and a literature of polarisation, dispossession and reappropriation are capable of reminding society that vigilance and critical thinking are de rigueur and conducive to tangible changes.

At the risk of surprising readers with unorthodox methodology and eclectic corpus, the aim will be to preserve the balance between a steady exploration and an in-depth analysis. Firstly, to bring together documentaries, fiction films and novels allows me to avoid the compartmentalisation of cultural forms. Secondly, the selected cultural forms reflect adequately the current social and political context whilst serving

²²⁹ Sartre, J-P. (1948) *Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

²³⁰ Maurice Blanchot's antagonistic views of Sartre are a perfect example that has put to the test the status and definition of such a literary genre during the after-war period. [In Opelz, H. (July 2007) '*Blanchot et Sartre, entre l'écriture et le monde*', Les Temps Modernes, n^{os} 643-644].

²³¹ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism, Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945* (London & New York: Verso), p. 45.

²³² Caviglioli, D. (2010) 'Voici le roman d'entreprise', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 01 September. Available from: <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20100901.BIB5544/voici-le-roman-d-039-entreprise.html> [Accessed 09 October 2014].

²³³ Bourdieu, P. (1993) *La Misère du monde* (Paris: Editions du Seuil), p. 11.

and illustrating the themes developed within each chapter. Similar to the way Chapter One is shaped by the transitional process of the transformations at the workplace, there is to be a cut-off point in the selection of cultural forms that I shall explore. As my goal is not to have an encyclopaedic approach with regard to all the existing films and literature in which workplace issues are tackled, it is therefore vital to preserve the ‘work in progress’ and iconoclastic spirit that is central to this project.

Some significant films (e.g. *La Loi du marché* [2015] by Stéphane Brizé)²³⁴ or novels such as these awarded with *le Prix du roman d’entreprise et du travail* since its creation in 2008 (see the introduction of Chapter Four) have not been incorporated. Exploring them in a more explicit manner would have had an overlapping effect with others that share identical themes therefore weakening and/or interrupting the analytical thread. If rarity of available material for any PhD researcher can be a potentially challenging hurdle, inversely in my case, having access to wide and expanding corpora has proved to be a real challenge in terms of selection and prioritisation. The solution I came up with was to stop assembling research material and to instead outline a set of clear-cut themes articulated through specific chapters and sections. Such a methodological choice brought clarity by deciding to incorporate certain art forms and not others. In other words, the predefined themes disseminated through my thesis would dictate the selection of films and novels therefore making some of them more relevant than others. From that particular point, things started to fall into place. Finally, if I have purposely overlooked a possible exploration of theatre, there is nonetheless a significant exception, *Daewoo* by François Bon which will be examined in Section Four of Chapter Four as it is precisely at the intersection of sociology, theatre and literature, within which the cathartic implication of female ex-workers has the power to heal the traumatic defeat of the social movement.²³⁵

²³⁴ *La Loi du marché* (2015) Directed by Stéphane Brizé [Film]. France: Nord-Ouest Films & Arte France Cinéma.

²³⁵ Bon, François (2004) *Daewoo* (Paris: Editions Le Livre de Poche).

Chapter Two

Workplaces and capital under scrutiny in examples of *documentaires du labeur*

1. Action! Filming the injustices in the new world of work

2. Assessing the impact of job insecurity and precarity

3. Resistance(s)

In this chapter, we shall explore documentary films that expose the effects of globalisation on the workforce and offer an essential cross-examination not only by denouncing in various degrees suffering and exploitation but also by bringing to light stories of uncompromising and inspiring resilience. Having in common a strong set of thematics such as how to deal with social defeats, moral responsibility, the consequences of atomisation as well as a new focus on class, these documentaries look at reality away from leftist grand narratives whilst rejecting the right-wing consensus. In the wake of deregulation of the industrial relations and the decline of trade unionism, they also play a compensatory pedagogical role by informing the public about the harshness of the way workers are atomised, given that the Marxist landmarks that were relied on by many have disappeared or gone under the radar. As Julie Esparbes observes:

En effet, alors que dans les années 70, le langage marxiste semblait uniforme, et la thématique de la lutte des classes partagée par tous; dans les années 90, le discours des cinéastes engagés semble être plus porteur de pluralisme. Il s'agit là d'une évolution majeure dans ce renouveau du cinéma engagé, à savoir: le passage d'une situation d'opposition assez monolithique (principalement contre l'Etat et ses institutions) à une situation plus complexe caractérisée par la multiplication des engagements et la réduction de leurs visées.¹

Thus, something has changed; one has moved away from the orthodox representation of the class system. The working class is in transition. So, why does this interest these film-makers? Are they filming an endangered species? Our argument is that they uncover disturbing aspects about today's workplace that have been sidelined and silenced in the process of class recomposition. Moreover, examining the subject in itself, e.g. depiction of the offices and the workshops day in,

¹ Esparbes, J. (2005) '*L'engagement dans le cinéma français contemporain*', Université Lyon 2 [online] http://doc.sciencespo-lyon.fr/Ressources/Documents/Etudiants/Memoires/Cyberdocs/MFE2005/esparbes_j/pdf/esparbes_j.pdf [Accessed 02 September 2017], p. 32.

day out, and the relation between the individual and the hierarchy, can represent a form of resistance regardless of any specific political agenda. The active participation of sociologists such as Christophe Dejours, Jacques G  n  reux, Lo  c Wacquant and Corinne Maier in these films also exemplifies the resurgence of a post-1990s critical engagement.

1. Action! Filming the injustices in the new world of work

Le r  el n'existe qu'   la condition qu'on le raconte. On nous apprenait dans nos r  unions politiques que l'histoire avait un substrat, le conflit du capital et des usines. Ce vieux champ persiste, toujours terriblement douloureux. Et qu'en surface il y avait ces vents mall  ables des id  ologies, les m  eurs qui en   taient le reflet. On s'est r  veill  s un peu tard, dans un monde o   la consommation    l'  chelle mondiale, le statut de l'image, la distraction devenue industrie avaient d  j   tout retaill   pour nous conduire en douceur. (Bon, F. (2007) *Bob Dylan: une biographie*, p. 10).

The exposure of class exploitation has found a reliable vehicle in the contemporary documentary film. For instance, *Films & Documentaires.com, un autre regard sur le monde*, a media library, makes available an impressive list of films on the subject, which keeps alive the struggles, hopes, pride, defeats, victories and *savoir-faire* of the labouring classes in France and all around the world.² By clicking on *Travail et social* in the drop-down menu, one can assess and appreciate the prolific social and militant data base that is available. The exhaustive list of documentaries one has access to represents a goldmine insofar as over 100 creations are listed in the aforementioned section. Most of them can be purchased but they can also be rented for a period of 48 hours for a very modest fee. The main objective of this expanding online platform, which has regrouped film producers and directors since 2008, is to give as much visibility as possible to their work with no restriction or obligation.

To name but a few, *Vive les vacances* chronicles the heart-breaking story of 300 Vietnamese female workers in a bag-making factory who are obliged to indefinitely postpone their annual four-day leave because the order book of the company which employs them keeps filling up, with no end in sight.³ In *La promesse de Florange*, Anne Gintzburger and Fran  ck Vrignon meticulously filmed for a whole year what was at stake between presidential candidate Fran  ois Hollande's pledge to oppose the closing of the factory decided by the steel and mining company ArcelorMittal and the

² *Films & Documentaires.com, un regard sur le monde* [online]. Available from: <http://www.filmsdocumentaires.com/6-societe/19-travail> [Accessed 16 April 2014].

³ *Vive les vacances* (2005) Directed by Alain Pitten [Documentary Film]. France: Canal 15, Les Films du Village, Zaradoc Films.

determined workers' fight for their livelihood. As a last attempt to save the last two blast furnaces in the Lorraine region, some of the latter organised a 350-km symbolic and highly mediatized march from Florange to Paris in order to expose their demand in a nationwide election context.⁴ Also available in the media library, *Daewoo* by François Bon, filmed by Marc Grün, represents the perfect bridge between *documentaires* and *littérature du labeur* (see Section Four of Chapter Four).⁵ The creation of a theatre play, rehearsed and performed in one of the emptied workshops, brings some meaning to the absurdity of the mechanics of outsourcing, whilst allowing the defeated female workers to be able to definitely close the doors of the factory with a shared sense of regained dignity. The conflation of literature, film and theatre did not reverse the outcome of the social defeat – yet it never aspired to do so. As worthwhile and meaningful as it may be, the effectiveness of the 'social group therapy' and the restoration of pride remain unquantifiable.

When the employees of one of the factories of Molex were praised and even rewarded for their outstanding results by senior management, which organised a lavish reception for them in July 2008, they did not have the faintest idea that their branch would be definitely closed down a few months later. *Les Molex, des gens debout* by José Alcalá recounts the struggles of staff seeking justice whilst trying to make sense of a final decision dictated by the so-called global interdependence of the financial markets.⁶ *L'avenir ne tombera pas du Ciel* is another striking documentary in which the main subject Emmanuel Poirier, a worker from the construction company Eiffage, which employs about 30,000 people allocated into 550 different branches, pays the price for being a seasoned CGT representative. Notwithstanding the obstacles, he takes the difficult challenge of reaching out to his fellow-workers in order to channel their atomised grievances and demands into a collective movement that will not be ignored by the employers. Despite being given tasks that are suited to someone with much less expertise and that keep him away from the teams on a daily basis, his exemplary determination and aspiration for better pay and working conditions remain unscathed.⁷

⁴ *La promesse de Florange* (2013) Directed by Anne Gintzburger & Franck Vrignon. [Documentary Film] France: Doriane Films, Chasseurs d'étoiles.

⁵ *Daewoo* (2005) Directed by Marc Grün [Documentary Film]. France: Ere Production.

⁶ *Les Molex, des gens debout* (2010) Directed by José Alcalá [Documentary Film]. France: ADR Productions, TL.

⁷ *L'avenir ne tombera pas du Ciel* (1998) Directed by Jean-Luc Cohen [Documentary Film]. France: Les Films Grain de Sable.

Thus filming social struggles guarantees the transmission of a militant culture that can inspire future ones. In this respect, one can also watch one of the most important films made by director Jean-Louis Le Tacon, the controversial *Cochon qui s'en dédit*.⁸ The film tells the story of Maxime Duchemin who runs a pigsty in Brittany. Having to borrow a substantial amount of money from a bank in order to save his farm, Duchemin becomes consumed by his activity to the point that he never leaves the premises, ends up living naked among the animals, and almost loses his humanity by becoming one of them. Caught in a spiral insofar as his main fear is not being able to repay the loan, he hardly manages to pay his creditors back with the money earned. Awarded the Prix Georges Sadoul in 1980, *Cochon qui s'en dédit* remains a sharp warning against the aberrations of neo-liberalism. Olivier Bitoun perfectly encapsulates the social and artistic significance of the documentary with the following:

Cochon qui s'en dédit est en fait l'un des classiques du cinéma militant, un mouvement complètement oublié par l'histoire officielle du septième art. C'est ce cinéma, qui s'étend de 1967 à 1981 (soit une période allant des origines de Mai 68 à l'élection de François Mitterrand) que l'essayiste Patrick Leboutte raconte à travers la collection du *Geste cinématographique*. Il réhabilite ainsi brillamment des œuvres, des cinéastes, des expériences oubliées qui forment tout un ensemble qui prend ainsi sa place dans l'histoire des formes. Démarrant avec *Les Groupes Medvedkine* et touchant à sa fin avec *Cochon qui s'en dédit*, le cinéma militant est ce chaînon manquant entre Jean Rouch et les années 80 marquées par l'acceptation généralisée du cinéma documentaire comme cinéma d'auteur.⁹

Using a Super 8 camera, which symbolises the avant-garde of radical filming in French New Wave Cinema,¹⁰ the director might decide on the final cut – yet most importantly some scenes are filmed by Duchemin himself. It is a method that Le Tacon usually utilises in his documentaries, allowing his objects to play an active role in the making of the films and, therefore, becoming subjects. Would the exploited working class with a camera adopt a different stance on their condition? Without over-estimating the potency of the process, one wonders what could have happened if the aforementioned female Vietnamese workers had been trained to film their daily working conditions. Might it have been the dawn of a collective awareness that could prefigure tangible changes or at least to consider their condition from a different perspective?

⁸ *Cochon qui s'en dédit* (1979) Directed by Jean-Louis Le Tacon [Documentary Film], op. cit.

⁹ Bitoun, O. (2011) 'Cochon qui s'en dédit' [online review] 01 January. Available from: <http://www.dvdclassik.com/critique/cochon-qui-s-en-dedit-le-tacon> [Accessed 16 February 2014].

¹⁰ Hitchman, S. (2008) 'French New Wave: Where to Start', *newwavefilm.com* [online]. Available from: <http://www.newwavefilm.com/new-wave-cinema-guide/nouvelle-vague-where-to-start.shtml> [Accessed 16 February 2014].

Retrospectively, the role reversal of the use of the camera was adopted by *Les Groupes Medvedkine*, a movement inspired by director Alexandre Medvedkine (1900-1989). In the early 1930s he used to travel by train through the USSR and film the workers in their workshops and factories, showing them the films immediately after they had been edited.¹¹ The objective of his initiative was to present the labouring classes as key players in the newly established communist society and to develop a sense of self-awareness that would not only lead to self-recognition but also encourage improvements in their daily praxis, therefore fostering class consciousness and social empowerment in relation to the means of production. Between 1967 and 1974, 14 documentaries were made by *Les Groupes Medvedkine*, with directors such as Chris Marker, Mario Marret, Antoine Bonfanti and Jacques Loiseleux. After *A bientôt, j'espère*, Marker and Marret decided to hand over the camera to the workers.¹² Moreover, for a period of six months, they taught about 20 workers the techniques of filming, which would lead to the emergence of a strong sense of militancy as the way to shake the bourgeois establishment.

If watching themselves in the films had laid the groundwork for class identity awareness, the transformative impact is radically spurred when the workers start to take control of the camera. Teaching them how to use the device was also a powerful pedagogical method that would lead to liberation and autonomy during and in the wake of the May 1968 revolt. By distancing themselves from their work and social conditions, the camera-operators thus invented a substantial critical thinking of their own. The core idea of the project was to emancipate them from the dominant culture by a clear reappropriation of the means of production. As Raymond Williams observes and warns:

Indeed, since by definition, the cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetrate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of the hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.¹³

¹¹ Douin, J-L. (2005) 'Alexandre Medvedkine, la science du masque', *Le Monde* [online] 07 April. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2005/04/07/alexandre-medvedkine-la-science-du-masque_636453_3476.html [Accessed 16 February 2014].

¹² *A bientôt, j'espère*, (1968) Directed by Chris Marker & Mario Marret [Documentary Film]. France: Société pour le Lancement des Œuvres Nouvelles (SLON).

¹³ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 71.

However the last two films were more sombre and pessimistic. *Septembre chilien*,¹⁴ filmed two weeks after Pinochet's coup d'état, might have gained in professionalism and quality (timed voiceovers by professional actors (Simone Signoret and Pierre Santini), narrative distancing effect from the objects and elaborated editing), but it lost the spontaneity and 'work in progress' spirit that characterised the previous ones. Hope is totally absent from *Avec le sang des autres*,¹⁵ in which Bruno Muel filmed the Peugeot factory in Sochaux, from the assembly lines to the story of the founders of the company. Olivier Bitoun observes:

Les employés Peugeot sont allés à l'école privée Peugeot, à l'école d'apprentissage Peugeot, ont joué dans le club de sport Peugeot. Et ils sont enterrés dans des cercueils Peugeot portés par des corbillards Peugeot. [...] En ville, Peugeot loge ses employés dans un semis de petites cités mal desservies. Chaque habitant peut difficilement gagner le centre ou d'autres foyers de travailleurs, le seul transport en commun est celui qui les mène à l'usine.¹⁶

Whether Philippe Claudel's fantastic publication *L'Enquête* (examined in Section Three of Chapter Four) was inspired by Muel's work or not, the analogies between the two are rather astonishing. Peugeot's grip on the workers, which goes well beyond the premises of the factory, echoes that of the totalitarian company in the novel.¹⁷

Yet six years separated *Avec le sang des autres* from *Sochaux, 11 juin 1968*,¹⁸ a raw and vivid documentary made by *Le Collectif cinéaste et travailleurs de Sochaux* and based on the violent and deadly clashes that opposed the CRS¹⁹ and the workers at the heart of the city that day. Notwithstanding the rather pessimistic viewpoint, *Septembre chilien* and *Avec le sang des autres* already prefigured a more classic, tame and didactic model of documentaries that would become prevalent in the late 1990s and the 2000s. For better or worse, these were formatted for television, maybe at the detriment of a more experimental approach that characterised those made for cinema. The upside of using television was that they reached a larger audience eager to participate in debates, therefore attracting attention from the press and social media.

¹⁴ *Septembre chilien* (1973) Directed by Bruno Muel [Documentary Film]. France: Bruno Muel Production.

¹⁵ *Avec le sang des autres* (1974) Directed by Bruno Muel [Documentary Film]. France: Slon-Iskra-Bruno Muel Production.

¹⁶ Bitoun, O. (2006) 'Groupes Medvedkine' [online] 21 March. Available from: <http://www.dvdclassik.com/critique/a-bientot-j-espere-marker-marret> [Accessed 17 February 2015].

¹⁷ Claudel, P. (2010) *L'Enquête* (Paris: Editions Stock).

¹⁸ Calinon, T. (2008) 'Juin meurtrier à Sochaux', *Libération* [online] 30 May. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/grand-angle/2008/05/30/juin-meurtrier-a-sochaux_72909 [Accessed 17 February 2015].

¹⁹ Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité.

They became a new and legitimate platform for voicing the concerns inherent in today's workplace.

Mainly sponsored by independent TV productions, the key documentary films we shall discuss address the transformations in the world of work caused by neo-liberalism in France. Without being over-descriptive, it is now important to clarify some relevant aspects and specific contexts that the films tackle. We will therefore articulate our analysis around the notions of control and resistance that emerge from situations of endemic alienation, exploitation and unfair treatment in the place of work. *Attention danger travail*, *La mise à mort du travail*, (broadcast on France 3 Television during peak viewing hours, and winner of the Albert Londres Award in 2010), *J'ai très mal au travail*, *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (inspired by and adapted from the bestseller *Souffrance en France* (2000) by Christophe Dejours; followed in 2008 by Marie Pezé's publication which shares the same title) all have an identical aim.²⁰ They expose, with supporting evidence, the social, economic and psychosomatic consequences of the policies of neo-liberalism for the workforce in MNCs. As for *L'Encerclement*,²¹ a French-Canadian production that has won multiple awards, it examines more broadly the threats that neo-liberalism represents for democratic values. In a very didactic manner, the aforementioned eloquent, self-explanatory, somewhat dramatic and tragic titles strip away any ambiguities about the directors-instigators' motivations and pedagogical goals.

Attention danger travail (2003) is a stark warning like those engraved on a signpost and addressed to the whole society: a deterrent against trespassing. It posits the world of work as being full of threats for the entire workforce. In a more positive manner, one could consider it a slogan easily used for the purpose of a demonstration, implying that some expression of political activism may be back on the map. The film poster is quite revealing.²²

Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés (2005) is an axiomatic title. The use of highly charged verbs like 'mourir' and 'frapper', the latter conjugated in

²⁰ *Attention danger travail* (2003) Directed by Pierre Carles, Christophe Coello & Stéphane Goxe [Documentary Film]. France: CP Productions; *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) Directed by Jean-Robert Viallet, op. cit. *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007) Directed by Jean-Michel Carré [Documentary Film] France: Les Acacias; *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (2005) Sophie Bruneau & Marc-Antoine Roudil [Documentary Film]. France: Alter Ego Films.

²¹ *L'Encerclement, La démocratie dans les rets du néolibéralisme* (2009) Directed by Richard Brouillette [Documentary Film] op. cit.

²² 'Attention danger travail' (Source: les mutins.org), see film poster on page 236.

the passive mood (i.e. struck by what/whom?), and the repetition of the plural pronoun 'tous' which blocks any possibility of respite/an alternative, makes it all sound like a curse that has descended upon the entire workforce. The title is word for word an alexandrine extracted from Jean de la Fontaine's poem entitled *Les Animaux malades de la peste*:

Un mal qui répand la terreur,
Mal que le Ciel en sa fureur
Inventa pour punir les crimes de la terre,
La Peste (puisqu'il faut l'appeler par son nom)
Capable d'enrichir en un jour l'Achéron,
Faisait aux animaux la guerre.
Ils ne mouraient pas tous, mais tous étaient frappés [...].²³

La mise à mort du travail (2009) is a methodical social execution articulated through three chapters (*La Dépossession*, *L'Aliénation*, *La Destruction*), from which emanates a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness in the way employees are exploited in globalised companies. Yet the clarification made by the film director is of utmost importance to understand the purpose of the documentary. He states: 'Parler de "mise à mort du travail", ce n'est pas dire que les conditions de travail d'un employé de Fenwick sont pires aujourd'hui que celles d'un ouvrier à la chaîne il y a cinquante ans, ni prophétiser "la fin du travail", c'est dire qu'on est en train de vider le travail de sa substance, de ce qui lui permet de donner du sens à nos vies.'²⁴

Last but not least, in the booklet provided with the DVD of *L'Encerclement - la démocratie dans les rets du néolibéralisme* (2009), one can read the following synopsis: 'A travers les réflexions et les analyses de plusieurs intellectuels de renom, le film retrace un portrait de l'idéologie néolibérale et examine les mécanismes mis à l'œuvre pour en imposer mondialement les diktats.' Notwithstanding a less one-sided perspective unambiguously exposed in the aforementioned films, and given that the narrative structure allows a more didactic view, the prerequisite remains anchored in what the title conveys, i.e. neo-liberalism has engineered a planetary coup that is successful beyond expectation insofar as any form of resistance has been smashed and annihilated. The trouble here is that it may sound a little bit conspiratorial and irreversible.

²³ La Fontaine, J. de (1678) *Recueil II, Livre VII* [online]. Available from: <http://www.la-fontaine-ch-thierry.net/animalpes.htm> [Accessed 17 February 2015].

²⁴ *La mise à mort du travail* (2009). *Economie Autrement* [online] (p. 10). Available from: <http://mecanoblog.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/la-mise-a-mort-du-travail-documentaire> [Accessed 05 March 2014].

All in all, one may argue that most of these documentaries look back over the last two decades without looking towards the next two. This may be their pedagogical goal but ‘to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing’.²⁵ Conducted as journalistic investigations, most of these films give evidence of the perils linked to the process of the transformations in the workplace of MNCs whilst exposing the consequences of the steady suppression of jobs in France. Equally, they fill a social and political void by compensating for the defeat of the left and of its adjoining organisations and political parties, as examined in the previous chapter. As the following excerpt from an article written by Jérôme Garcin in *Le Nouvel Observateur* highlights: ‘Hier négligés, marginalisés, voire déconsidérés (pour les désigner, on avait même inventé le néologisme méprisant de "docucul"), ils ont aujourd’hui les faveurs d’un public qui a de bonnes raisons, en période de crise et de tragédies, de préférer l’investigation à la science-fiction, le réel au surnaturel et la vérité au mensonge.’²⁶

On the other hand, one could argue here to what extent these employees ‘*en souffrance*’, defenceless, passive or fighting back alone, are truly emblematic of the reality of work. Interestingly, if only four representative patients were selected for the last stage of the editing in the case of Bruneau and Roudil’s *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (2005), 37 patients were extensively interviewed. As for Viallet’s *La mise à mort du travail* (2009), several hundred employees from the tertiary sector were approached, which suggests that suffering may be rife indeed. As Patricia Boutinard Rouelle sums up:

Après deux ans et demi d’enquête, il nous fait pénétrer dans un monde où les caméras ne sont jamais les bienvenues: celui de l’entreprise. Jean-Robert Viallet, le réalisateur, a repris les grands principes qui font la force des précédentes séries: unité de lieu, temps long de préparation et de tournage, recherche de situations archétypiques et non extrêmes, collaboration des institutions concernées (ici les prud’hommes, l’hôpital, la Bourse du travail) et accord de toutes les parties. Ce travail monumental, systématique et rigoureux nous permet de mieux comprendre cette relation complexe entre le travail et le capital, entre des entreprises, leurs dirigeants et leurs salariés.²⁷

According to their supporters, the films re-establish a balance by reinstating valuable critical standpoints through the systematic use of hard facts and authentic testimonies, which allows them to avoid falling into the shackles of any dogmatism

²⁵ Williams, R. (1989) *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London & New York: Verso), p. 118.

²⁶ Garcin, J. (2015) ‘La revanche du documentaire sur la fiction’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 09 March. Available from: <http://m.nouvelobs.com/article/20150309.OBS4180/1-abri-le-cercle-citizenfour-la-revanche-du-documentaire.html> [Accessed 12 March 2015].

²⁷ Boutinard Rouelle, P. (2009) ‘La mise à mort du travail’, *Economie Autrement* [online]. Available from: http://economieautrement.org/fichiers/dossier_de_presse_travail.pdf [Accessed 06 August 2015].

whilst preserving a strong sense of militancy. They all have in common a pedagogical commitment which outlines the dangers of unrestrained capitalism and the processes attempted by new managerialism to control blue- and white-collar workers alike. With an unequivocal stance, analogous to that of controversial American film-maker Michael Moore's sensational and punchy documentaries, e.g. *Capitalism: A Love Story*,²⁸ their lack of objectivity represents a constructive bias for reinvigorating polarised political perspectives and this is what makes them worthwhile and freshly radical. The countervailing narrative of the contemporary 'whistleblowers' represents a welcomed antidote for the perception of a prevalent conformism from the 1980s to early 1990s characterised by a 'rupture dans la chaîne de transmission de l'expérience militante'.²⁹ Their impact, and that of the fiction films and writings explored in the next chapters, can make the ordinary viewer aware that suffering is also shared by others, thus connecting exploited workers as a potential collective from which may emerge some form of regained solidarity despite declining trade unionism. More importantly maybe, these films give the ordinary viewer access to the methods/procedures that other victims deploy in order to resist and fight back.

On the other hand, the films' detractors have labelled them as being one-sided, Manichean and only preaching to the converted by ignoring the complexity of the situation or belittling the other side of the argument. In truth, there is always a risk that film directors talk to themselves in an echo-chamber, which gives them more importance than they really bear. In my view, trade unionists who have experienced defeat on the frontline of militant disputes are given too little visibility whereas doctors, psychologists and sociologists are readily featured like members of aid agencies following the aftermath of social cleansings. Furthermore, adding up and detailing cases of unfair treatment or dismissals in the workplace may not necessarily give an accurate broad picture of the socio-economic reality nationwide. Thus, an overarching critique of neo-liberalism, stripped of counter-arguments, puts into place its own pitfall by replacing it with sterile perspectives. As Martin O'Shaughnessy puts it:

Tied to production, they can make no positive appearance in a society of spectacle dominated by consumption and the commodity. Resurgent French documentary film-making has resisted this

²⁸ *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) Directed by Michael Moore [Documentary Film]. USA: Dog Eat Dog Films & The Weinstein Company.

²⁹ Perron, T. (2003) 'De quelques combats du jeune cinéma français', *Nouveau cinéma militant* [online] 04 May. Available from: <http://www.peripherie.asso.fr/nouveau-cinema-militant/de-quelques-combats-du-jeune-cinema-francais> [Accessed 06 August 2014].

trend [the erasure of the working class] by faithfully recording their struggles against neo-liberalism but, by so doing, it has only been able to accompany a defeat and provide inadvertent confirmation of the situation.³⁰

As the above quotation infers, when critical thinking does not deliver beyond an ‘inadvertent confirmation of the situation’, what may persist is an expression of morbid fascination vis-à-vis its objects. However, acknowledging the defeat is not the same as being defeatist and declinist. Last but not least, does one not expect too much from critique, as if it conveys over-estimated qualities that can shake the balance of power by themselves?

We shall now focus on the mechanics of solitude and suffering in the workplace that result from the banalization of the lean production (see Section Two of Chapter One) that these films investigate through the testimonies of archetypal employees.

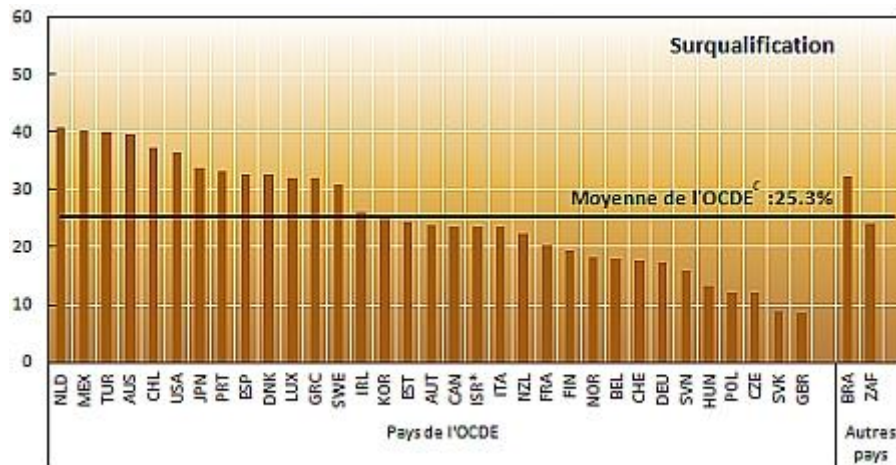
2. Assessing the impact of job insecurity and precarity

La compétition disloque toute solidarité et renvoie l’individu à une solitude méfiante.
(Marzano, M. (2008) *Extension du domaine de la manipulation, De l’entreprise à la vie privée*, p. 154).

‘Little’ miseries in the workplace

One of the first documentaries of the last decade exploring the effects of corporatization in France, *Attention danger travail* (2003) by Carles, Coello, and Goxe probes companies such as Domino’s Pizza in which new work organisations (characterised by just-in-time production and standardisation) have been implemented. It opens with the filming of the behaviour and reactions of a group of young adult applicants (some of them going through the third round of the selection process), among whom are highly qualified but jobless ones trained by a management team during an induction course. As the following graph shows, over-qualification is a worldwide phenomenon. According to a survey conducted by the OECD in 2011, over 25% of workers are over-qualified for the job they perform. In France alone, it is almost 20%.

³⁰ O’Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 57.



[Source: www.oecd.org]

Video clips as means of commonplace propaganda praising the achievements of the company are the starting point for discussions and brainstorming sessions. A set of formatted behaviours indistinguishable from that of competences has to be acquired and internalised in order for the applicants to obtain the job, which justifies their involvement at every stage of the process. As Dominique Huez observes: ‘A l’époque du taylorisme, les systèmes de production usaient les corps. Avec les nouvelles formes d’organisation, de management et de contrôle du travail, c’est le psychisme qui est d’abord attaqué.’³¹ Elements of control derived from Taylorism and Toyotism have somehow converged. Such a combination has aggravated the meaninglessness of work in numerous instances.

The real purpose of these sessions is nonetheless to identify and eliminate the candidates who will not conform to the standardised rules. From how to wear the uniform and make sure that the gap between the cap and each employee’s hair is in accordance with the company’s worldwide criteria, to the timing of deliveries through intensive role-play, Domino’s values are transmitted by means of buzz-phrases, e.g. ‘Un client pour la vie; Ne le quittez pas!’; and ‘Domino’s Pizza ne satisfait pas, Domino’s Pizza enchante!’ Globalised slogans for a globalised workplace and literally translated from English, they are identical in every language. In the same documentary, specific aspects of Taylorism such as constant exhaustion and anxiety are brought to light through the voiceover testimony of a male operator whose wish to remain anonymous perhaps underscores a widespread culture of fear among his professional category. The interviewee compares his activity to a sum of reflexes,

³¹ Huez, D. (2008) *Souffrir au travail, comprendre pour agir* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Editions Privé), p. 62.

complaining about the constant and increasing pain his hands are subjected to. His life after work is at best reduced to a recovery period and nothing else. He highlights the difficulty of keeping up with the rate of production and subsequent explosions of rage either against his own tools or himself when pace is lost in the extremely noisy environment of a car assembly line, which is similar to the operators' pleas in Lydie Salvayre's outstanding novel *La Médaille* in Section Three of Chapter Four.³² As Christophe Dejours puts it: 'Ou bien le travail s'inscrit comme médiateur dans la construction de l'identité et de la santé, ou bien il contribue à désorganiser l'identité, voire à la détruire, et il devient alors un facteur pathogène de grande puissance.'³³

Another form of 'little' misery is highlighted in Viallet's *La Dépossession (La mise à mort du travail)*, 2009: Part Three). During the annual meeting of the sales representatives of Fenwick, the CEO opens his speech by showing footage of an interview with Aimé Jacquet, former coach of the French football team, when they won the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Jacquet gives feedback to the players in the dressing room and criticises them for not being aggressive and efficient enough. This opening is then used as a platform to launch harsh criticism, blaming staff members for the latest supposedly poor financial results. As one of the directors of commercial resources unequivocally confesses: 'Être bon, ça ne suffit pas, donner son maximum, nous, ça ne nous convient pas. Il y a une réelle motivation à se dépasser, c'est surtout ça qui est important; c'est de mettre en condition nos forces de ventes pour générer du dépassement. C'est cela qui fait l'excellence.' Allegorising the world of sport with that of work (which is dramatised in Lionel Bailliu's long feature *Fair Play* (2005) in Section Three of Chapter Three),³⁴ he clearly repeats a Toyotist-esque discourse he has internalised, or perhaps pretended to, in order to keep his position in the company.

The conviviality and team spirit that emerge from the meeting are just a façade that hardly hides a sense of apprehension and muted competition mixed with the guilt of failing the objectives of Fenwick, which is considered a personal failure whilst the senior management's accountability is systematically exonerated. Despite the jokes they share in order to encourage each other, each sales representative is on their own and knows it. As Jean-Pierre Le Goff puts it: 'Etrange synthèse de maoïsme et de libéralisme, cette logique mène alors à des systèmes de délation et d'autocritique. Le

³² Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

³³ Marzano, M. (2008) *Extension du domaine de la manipulation, De l'entreprise à la vie privée*, op. cit., p. 155.

³⁴ *Fair Play* (2005) Directed by Lionel Bailliu [Film]. France: TFM Distribution.

contrevenant doit se punir, se licencier, s'exclure lui-même, marque ultime de son autonomie, de sa liberté, et de sa responsabilité.³⁵ These overqualified delivery men, operators and sales representatives have in common a sense of solitude rooted in market deregulation and deunionisation.

Among the numerous and telling testimonies presented in the film is that of Mrs M., a factory worker, who warmly talks about her job before a drastic restructuring. She does not deny that it was hard but adds adamantly that the difficulties were compensated for by genuine cooperation between her and her fellow-workers. As underscored in Section Two of the previous chapter, if the level of complexity of any production line varies in terms of the ability of, and implications for, the worker, it is worthwhile mentioning once again that sub-teams form within larger ones and are keen to establish the practice of solidarity through cooperation and expertise. As a result, stress is dealt with by being evenly shared between the sub-team members who set up their own subterranean micro-organisation within the organisation. Not only does this have no negative impact on productivity, but inversely it can increase it, as well as bringing about better working conditions. When the company is bought by a big American firm, Mrs M.'s working conditions start to deteriorate given that a new standardised organisation is implemented, replacing the existing one. Just-in-time production oblige, after retirement staff are not replaced and temps are only hired by the new management during busy periods. Subjected to harsh Taylorist methods, she complies but eventually cannot cope with the drastic leap in her productivity rate. (Her productivity has to be multiplied by a factor of almost four insofar as she has to manufacture 1200 lipsticks instead of the initial 350 pieces per hour.) Her body finishes by letting her down. Notwithstanding the unrealistic target set by the new management, she has to come to terms with a deep-rooted sense of incompetence. She leaves her job and undertakes a long-term medical treatment which involves the use of morphine to ease the pain that the increasing pace imposed on her has induced. In the practitioner's own comforting words: 'Il n'y a pas de culpabilité à avoir. C'est vous qui êtes porteuse d'une histoire et de valeurs qui ne sont plus en accord avec celles de vos supérieurs.' There is also a thin line between management of dissatisfaction and of intimidation as the following example highlights. Marie-Claude,

³⁵ Le Goff, J-P. (2000) 'La modernisation aveugle des entreprises et de l'école', *Conférence at the Centre Social de Cosne* [online] 05 May. Available from: <http://cdrcosne.free.fr/legocf.htm> [Accessed 06 August 2014].

who is also interviewed, used to work for an import-export company and had to increase her productivity rate by 17% every year. As she sums up : ‘Au lieu de mettre quelqu’un à côté de moi, on a fini par mettre quelqu’un au-dessus de moi.’ Such a decision almost costs her her life. Evidence of burnout, suicidal behaviour, her story brings to light one of the psychopathic traits that are now attached to management methods, ‘[p]arce qu’on impose des résultats sans jamais se demander si les contraintes réelles permettent de les atteindre et sans jamais se pencher sur la manière de faire des hommes. Etre, paraître ou manière de servir sont les critères de jugement de ce système aliénant.’³⁶

The aforementioned cases are not isolated but representative of a more general trend in terms of social significance. According to Viallet’s documentary, France is ranked in third position after Norway and the USA with regard to hourly working productivity, which contradicts the prevalent preconceived idea that the French worker is a slacker.³⁷ It is not a coincidence that 10% of the male working population has a drinking problem and 8% takes psychoactive drugs on a regular basis in order to cope with the increased constraints that affect their jobs. One quarter of male and one third of female workers suffer from psychological disorders linked to their professional occupations, a phenomenon highlighted in the film through the study of a particular job, that of the *hôte/hôtesse de caisse*.

Globalisation and health

Style and approach are undeniably more journalistic in Viallet’s work, but like in Anna Sam’s autobiographical novel *Les Tribulations d’une caissière* (see Section Four of Chapter Four),³⁸ a dehumanisation of the world of work has gone along with the decline in job security beyond multinational companies. One of the main reasons why cashiers are prominent objects of study in film and literature is that they are on the front line of the imbrication of the use of new technologies and the increasing demands in terms of profitability, which has reduced their activities to a mono-function as a direct consequence of automation. Whilst less than 10% of the body

³⁶ Huez, D. (2008) *Souffrir au travail, comprendre pour agir*, op. cit., p. 71.

³⁷ Matthews, C. (2014) ‘French workers aren’t as lazy as you think’, *Fortune* [online] 28 August. Available from: <http://fortune.com/2014/08/28/france-workers-work-week/> [Accessed 27 February 2016].

³⁸ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d’une caissière*, op. cit.

parts are submitted to intense activity, about 90% of them remain totally inactive.³⁹ Each till unit corresponds to one micro assembly line, from the rolling carpet on which purchases are placed to the filling of the bag and the payment transaction. From a Taylorist perspective, the tasks performed were divided into seven stages up until the turn of the 20th century.⁴⁰ After greeting the customer, the employee had to take the item, check and enter its price manually into the cash register till, then place the item further along for collection by the customer. Finally, payment and goodbyes closed the transaction.

Nowadays, though, the operation consists of five stages: greeting the customer, lifting the item, scanning its barcode, dealing with the different types of payment, and goodbyes. Paradoxically, this reduction in terms of gestures has made the job much harder in many ways, rather than easier. Passing from seven identified stages to five has been damaging to employees who are already subjected to a monotonous yet frenetic activity. As a matter of fact, the compression of their repetitive tasks results in an acceleration of the pace, which increases in turn its arduousness by paving the way for potential psychosomatic disorders.⁴¹ For comparison, it is also noteworthy that British cashiers are more likely to pack the items for the customers whereas their French counterparts for the moment do not carry out this extra task. This proves that strictly standardised rules can be applied to a certain point however not at the same pace. In *Encaisser!* sociologist Marlène Benquet, who used to work as a cashier when she was a student, gives an insight into the stress factors related to the profession. If being subjected to permanent control, lack of gratification and excessive fatigue top the bill, interestingly, one of the main causes of stress also comes from the fact that the employees are not allowed to make any decision at all. Any problem that occurs has to be referred immediately to the line manager on site who will deal with it.⁴²

In this particular case, the job role that was primarily defined by Taylorist methods prior to the implementation of automation has started to adopt certain characteristics derived from Toyotism. Consequently, the lack of responsibilities that characterises Taylorism is as damaging to the employee as the insidious and

³⁹ The employee is entitled to a 16-minute break for every three hours of work.

⁴⁰ Four gestures according to Jean-Robert Viallet in *La mise à mort du travail*, Part One, op. cit. However, in our view this does not take into account the following stages: greetings, payment and goodbyes.

⁴¹ Dejours, C. (2000) *Travail: usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail*, op. cit., pp. 253-257.

⁴² See Benquet, M. (2013) *Encaisser!* (Paris: Editions La Découverte).

internalised responsibilities induced by Toyotism. Since 2007, unions have taken action in order to save jobs threatened by full automation. According to their predictions, half will disappear by the end of 2012, which corresponds to up to 85,000 positions in France. This was confirmed in a recent article in *L'Humanité* newspaper.⁴³ On the other hand, The Medef⁴⁴ (the largest union of employers in France) has disputed those figures insofar as it considers that automation will result in a reorganisation of professional tasks but not necessarily in redundancies.⁴⁵ More importantly, in *Travail et automatisation des services. La fin des caissières?*, Sophie Bernard examines the impact of complete automation on staff members whose tasks and roles are redefined, as well as their relation with customers.⁴⁶ As for whether such a transformation jeopardises the dignity of work or not, Marie-Anne Dujarier specifies: 'Rationalisation, standardisation et automatisation du service transforment alors l'activité des professionnels. Ce processus est vécu de manière ambivalente: à la fois disqualifiante (ce que l'on fait peut être fait par une machine ou par n'importe qui) et requalifiante (il faut s'occuper de machines complexes).'⁴⁷ In point of fact, as a logical culmination of Taylorism would be expected, the implementation of automation is not limited to jobs characterised by repetitive tasks.⁴⁸ It also stipulates that other sectors have suffered from it. All in all, the cashier paradigm archetypally totalises the tangible effects of globalised capitalism through bodies and workplaces. Andrew Kliman writes:

In principle, the rate of growth would also increase if fewer machines were needed to produce the same number of new machines or the same amount of food, but the capitalistic tendency to replace workers with machines makes that less likely to happen. Thus, rather than being a system that produces for consumption's sake, capitalism increasingly becomes a system of production for production's sake, the production of machines in order to produce more machines.⁴⁹

⁴³ Maillet, F. (2015) 'Avec les caisses automatiques, l'emploi baisse, le stress monte', *L'Humanité* [online] 02 March. Available from: <http://www.humanite.fr/avec-les-caisses-automatiques-lemploi-baisse-le-stress-monte-566994> [Accessed 30 July 2016].

⁴⁴ Mouvement des entreprises de France.

⁴⁵ Medef-NC (2012) 'Les métiers d'avenir ne sont pas forcément de nouveaux métiers', *Medef-NC* [online]. Available from: <http://www.medef.nc/emploi-formation/actus-emploi-formation/focus-emploi-formation/426-les-metiers-d-avenir-ne-sont-pas-forcement-de-nouveaux-metiers> [Accessed 22 August 2014].

⁴⁶ Bernard, S. (2012) *Travail et automatisation des services. La fin des caissières?* (Toulouse: Octarès Editions).

⁴⁷ Dujarier, M-A. (2008) *Le travail du consommateur*, op. cit., p. 190.

⁴⁸ Guillaud, H. (2014) 'Travail: l'automatisation en question', *Les Echos* [online] 18 January. Available from: <http://blogs.lesechos.fr/internetactu-net/travail-l-automatisation-en-question-a14081.html> [Accessed 05 June 2015].

⁴⁹ Kliman, A. (2011) *The Failure of Capitalist Production, Underlying Causes of the Great Recession*, (London: Pluto Press), p. 164.

The truth is that an increasing number of assembly line workers, sales assistants, office clerks, flight attendants⁵⁰ and nurses,⁵¹ to name but a few, are compelled to comply with lean production and its standardised rules and precarious contracts, which are identical to those in place in supermarket distribution and call centres where unfair treatment is commonplace.⁵²

Modification of behaviours

The use of intimidating and unethical methods by management teams cannot be considered a consequence of the emergence of neo-liberalism, given that they have always existed in the workplace. The question is to what extent such practices have been normalised nowadays. When Dejours, Huez and Le Goff speculate on the possible outcomes of today's societal transformations and workplace violence from an Arendtian perspective, they draw clear analogies between neo-liberalism and the totalitarian systems of the 20th century. According to them, the looming danger is that the current system engineers by default a brand new version of *operarius totalitarus*⁵³ with all the required features – obedient, passive-aggressive, zealous, manipulative, gullible, borderline and/or narcissist. The aforementioned features of the 'totalitarian worker' prepare the ground for what Hannah Arendt analysed and referred to as 'la banalisation du mal'.⁵⁴ Le Goff asks in a rhetorical manner: 'Ne trouve-t-on pas aujourd'hui des conditions sociales et psychologiques proches de celles décrites par H. Arendt ?'⁵⁵ The answer is partly provided in the interview with Régis in Viallet's *La Destruction* (2009). Régis, a former security guard at Carrefour, gives details in front of the camera about the most efficient and inventive methods he and his team use in order to get rid of staff members considered a liability. One of the tricks he is willing to share is that they leave some bait, like a digital camera, in a store room and then hide to watch what happens. The aim is to drive the targeted employee towards

⁵⁰ Rush, J. (2013) 'Ryanair cabin crew are only paid for hours spent 'in the air', have to pay £1,800 for compulsory training and are forced to take three months' unpaid leave, claims former air hostess', *The Daily Mail* [online] 17 May. Available from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2326003/Ryanair-air-hostess-blows-whistle-contract-staff-forced-months-unpaid-leave-buy-uniforms.html> [Accessed 20 August 2014].

⁵¹ Cazabat, S., Barthe, B. & Cascino, N. (2008) 'Charge de travail et stress professionnel: deux facettes d'une même réalité?', *Pistes* [online] 10 January. Available from: <https://pistes.revues.org/2159> [Accessed 22 August 2014].

⁵² Askenazy, P. (2004) *Les désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵³ Totalitarian worker (translated from Latin).

⁵⁴ Arendt, H. (1972) *Le Système totalitaire, les origines du totalitarisme*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

⁵⁵ Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire*, op. cit., p. 70.

professional misconduct. The legitimisation of such methods is explained in his own words which reveal the existence of an organised contest in this cat-and-mouse-like competitive game between different surveillance teams, proving that this practice is not only widespread and institutionalised at Carrefour but remains unchallenged. In the former security guard's own words: 'Dans chaque magasin, il y a un scoring sur le nombre d'employés interpellés. Donc, si on met les appâts, si on provoque les gens et tout, c'est simplement pour être les meilleurs.' The detachment with which he elaborates the different procedures is somewhat disconcerting. The young man is very articulate, focused. He faces the camera and simply explains the best and quickest ways to evict undesirable members of staff. This situation echoes the controversial baccalauréat topic mentioned at the very beginning of the introduction of this thesis.⁵⁶

Through a more psycho-analytical approach, Dejours focuses on new work organisations that have a disastrous impact on the workplace and affect the whole fabric of society by engendering and trivialising a widespread social injustice to which each individual participates in varying degrees. He writes: 'Pour continuer à vivre psychiquement tout en participant au "sale boulot" dans l'entreprise moderne et en conservant leur sens moral, beaucoup d'hommes et de femmes qui adoptent ces comportements virils élaborent collectivement des "idéologies défensives" grâce auxquelles est construite la rationalisation du mal.'⁵⁷ Régis openly shares his expertise as an expedient, showing a certain degree of self-confidence. His distorted sense of ethics or paucity of it makes any possibility of self-examination rather improbable, not to mention paucity of guilt and wrongdoing. By testifying, he becomes a whistleblower by default.

Yet exposing these methods cuts two ways insofar as they could all the same inspire other management teams to adopt the same practices in order to get rid of unwanted staff. These thought-provoking thematics are incorporated in Nicolas Koltz's fiction film explored in Section Three of Chapter Three.⁵⁸ How many Régis operate in supermarkets and other places of work? As Marie Pezé observes:

Parce qu'on voit bien comment les managers, les DRH adhèrent à ces modèles organisationnels où la pression morale est devenue un moyen d'intensifier la productivité [...]. Trente ans de chômage massif dans un pays, cela conduit à des conduites de soumission et de domination [...] Cette peur

⁵⁶ See Piquemal, M. (2009) 'Bac: le sujet qui dérange', *Libération* [online] 25 June. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2009/06/25/bac-le-sujet-qui-derange_566912 [Accessed 08 July 2009].

⁵⁷ Dejours, C. (1998) *Souffrance en France. La banalisation de l'injustice sociale*, op. cit., p. 214.

⁵⁸ *La Question humaine* (2008) Directed by Nicolas Klotz [Film]. France: Sophie Dulac Distribution.

qui est utilisée comme levier de pression fait que les gens acceptent de modifier leurs comportements.⁵⁹

Interviewed throughout the documentary, Marie Pezé, who started the first medical consultation specialising in the sufferings induced by lean production at the Nanterres Hospital in 1997,⁶⁰ is filmed on a daily basis taking charge of employees who are the victims of new work organisations. Being a pioneer in this field, she also participated in *Ils ne mouraient pas tous mais tous étaient frappés* (2005) and *J'ai très mal au travail* (2007). Consultations with ex-employees conducted by her are quite revealing as most of them present symptoms of physical pathologies that have occurred after being unfairly made redundant. Retrospectively, in *Le Monde* dated 24 July 2010, one could read: 'Marie Pezé, l'experte de la maltraitance au travail, a été licenciée pour inaptitude définitive.'⁶¹ Was she the victim of her extraordinary dedication, as a later article in the same newspaper implies?⁶²

In the next and final section of this chapter, we shall focus on the filming of workers who have developed eclectic forms of resistance and opted for alternative ways of life in order to escape control and not be crushed by work organisations. In parallel, we shall reflect on the soundness of their choices and assess how these choices challenge the mainstream notions of militancy and politics.

3. *Resistance(s)*

L'important, c'est que l'action ait eu lieu, alors que tout le monde la jugeait impensable. Si elle a eu lieu cette fois-ci, alors elle peut se reproduire. (Jean-Paul Sartre taking stock of the May 68 revolt in Ross, K. (2005) *Mai 68 et ses vies ultérieures*, p. 7).

Only five years after the political defeat of the May 68 movement, the workers of the watch factory Lip (see Section Two of Chapter One) collectively refused the imposed redundancy plan and wage-freeze by starting a struggle that would last for several months and become emblematic.⁶³ From stopping the production to bossnapping, the factory was occupied by determined personnel who refused to give

⁵⁹ In *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) Directed by Jean-Robert Viallet, Part One, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Twenty-three other similar practices have been created in France subsequently.

⁶¹ Bissuel, B. (2010) 'Marie Pezé, l'experte de la maltraitance au travail, a été licenciée pour "inaptitude définitive"', *Le Monde* [online] 24 July. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2010/07/24/marie-peze-l-experte-de-la-maltraitance-au-travail-a-ete-licenciee-pour-inaptitude-definitive_1391805_3234.html [Accessed 14 February 2015].

⁶² Bissuel, B. (2013) 'Une spécialiste de la souffrance au travail poursuit son ex-employeur', *Le Monde* [online] 06 December. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/12/06/une-specialiste-de-la-souffrance-au-travail-poursuit-son-ex-employeur_3526789_3224.html [Accessed 14 February 2015].

⁶³ Le Goff, J-P. (1998) *Mai 68, l'héritage impossible* (Paris: Editions La Découverte), pp. 239-247.

in. In order to sustain their livelihoods, staff decided to restart the production that they made their own and sold the products on their own terms. ‘C’est possible, on fabrique, on vend, on se paie.’ The slogan sums up one of the most successful attempts for self-management in modern history that inspired the making of Christian Rouaud’s documentary film *Les Lip, l’imagination au pouvoir*.⁶⁴ Watch sales even rocketed given the popularity of the project. Within a period of six weeks, the workers’ production equalled that of six months. By way of support, a national march was organised, joined by over 100,000 sympathisers. Eventually, negotiations resumed, resulting in the reinstatement of the employees. Retrospectively, this conflict was labelled as ‘le dernier conflit des Trente Glorieuses.’⁶⁵ Considered a swan song of the May 68 aspirations for radical changes but also as a landmark for struggles to come, the Lip story remains tantalisingly close to the utopian project come true, that of an alternative company in which relentless workers are in full control of the means of production. For the time being it has remained a unique experiment in contemporary France that still resonates four decades later.

Resistance is somehow multifaceted. In July 2000 in France, despite the loss in terms of jobs, the factory workers of Cellatex obtained a subsequent redundancy payment for each of them following the closure of the site after months of harsh conflict with the authorities. Supported by the local population, from bossnapping to the threat of blowing up the company situated in the centre of small town Givet in the Ardennes region, the strategy of all-out sabotage paid off, thanks to the unwavering solidarity among the 153 workers labelled as terrorists by some media.⁶⁶ Released in 2011, Maurice Failevic’s riveting drama *Jusqu’au bout* is directly based on their resilience and determination against the employers’ decision.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the strategies used by the Cellatex workers inspired others and the indemnities obtained (80,000 FRF) also became the threshold payment claimed by struggles taking place in

⁶⁴ *Les Lip, l’imagination au pouvoir* (2007) Directed by Christian Rouaud [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁶⁵ Fize, V. (2013) ‘Exposition ‘Lip 73’: il y a quarante ans, le combat des ouvriers de Besançon’, *France Info* [online] 02 October. Available from: <http://culturebox.francetvinfo.fr/expositions/exposition-lip-73-il-y-a-quarante-ans-le-combat-des-ouvriers-de-besancon-142753> [Accessed 17 January 2016].

⁶⁶ Larose, C., Bérout, S., Mouriaux, R. & Rabhi, M. (2001) *Cellatex, quand l’acide a coulé* (Paris: Editions Syllepse & VO Editions).

⁶⁷ *Jusqu’au bout* (2011) Directed by Maurice Failevic [Film]. France: Compagnie des Phares et Balises.

other companies such as Lu and Moulinex.⁶⁸ The market may have won but collective resistance nurtures strategies of dissent that have the potential to spread and to gain significant results. Resistance has also been the central element in the mini-wave of recent documentary films such as Françoise Davisse's *Comme des lions*,⁶⁹ and François Ruffin's *Merci patron!*⁷⁰ Davisse's documentary tells the story of the social struggle of Peugeot workers' organised and determined fight against the closure of their factory in Aulnay between 2011 and 2013.⁷¹ Acting like a French Michael Moore, Ruffin takes on the fight of ordinary workers Jocelyne and Serge Klur. Following the relocation of their textile manufacturing branch of the multinational luxury goods conglomerate LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) to Poland, the couple loses their jobs with devastating consequences (risk of expropriation, high level of unpaid debts). Using a fake identity and a hidden camera, the undercover film-maker decides to confront CEO Bernard Arnault by forcing him to pay the couple's debts by way of compensation. As Pierre Maillot would put it : 'Le cinéma documentaire se donne aussi "le réel" pour seule référence. Comme le reportage, il refuse l'imaginaire. Mais s'il se tient au réel, il n'a pas pour objet de le "couvrir", il veut au contraire le *découvrir*, le comprendre, en produire l'analyse, ou plutôt *une* analyse. Il veut faire apparaître ce qui reste caché au regard habitué.'⁷² The film has galvanised critics and audiences alike by starting spontaneous and lively debates immediately after its nationwide screening.⁷³ Moreover, in the wake of the nationwide opposition and street demonstrations against the aforementioned labour legislation deregulating the workplace known as *Loi Khomri* (see Section One of the previous chapter), Ruffin initiated *Nuit debout* in March 2016, a spontaneous nightly protest

⁶⁸ Simon, H. (2010) 'From Cellatex to Moulinex: Burst Up of an Open Social Violence', *Libcom.org* [online] 08 January. Available from: <https://libcom.org/library/cellatex-moulinex-burst-open-social-violence-wildcat> [Accessed 21 January 2015].

⁶⁹ *Comme des lions* (2016) Directed by Françoise Davisse [Documentary Film]. France & Belgium: Les Films du Balibari.

⁷⁰ *Merci patron!* (2016) Directed by François Ruffin [Documentary Film]. France: Mille et une productions, Les Quatre Cents Clous.

⁷¹ Dejean, M. (2016) 'Comme des lions: plongée dans la lutte des ouvriers de PSA-Aulnay', *Les Inrockuptibles* [online] 07 February. Available from: <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2016/02/07/actualite/comme-des-lions-plong%C3%A9-dans-la-lutte-des-ouvriers-de-psa-aulnay-11803392/> [Accessed 31 May 2016].

⁷² Maillot, P. (2012) 'L'écriture cinématographique de la sociologie filmique. Comment penser en sociologue avec une caméra?', *La nouvelle revue du travail* [online] 10 December. Available from: <https://nrt.revues.org/363> [Accessed 08 September 2017].

⁷³ Blottière, M. (2016) 'Le phénomène "Merci patron!": l'histoire d'un joyeux succès', *Télérama* [online] 24 March. Available from: <http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/le-phenomene-merci-patron-histoire-d-un-joyeux-succes,140117.php> [Accessed 06 March 2017].

which has since mobilised hundreds of thousands of citizens who have engaged in debates related to the workplace, culture, neo-liberalism, globalisation and resistance.

Not only were the issues of class confrontation and resistance crystallised in Ruffin's documentary but they were also disseminated by the director and his agitprop group. Similar to recent social movements such as Occupy Wall Street in the USA and the Spanish indignados, *Nuit debout* shares some of the characteristics of the May 68 revolt. Furthermore, Pierre Haski observes that the youth of the middle classes have played a central role, as in May 1968, whereas the young people from a disenfranchised background have not participated in the movement whatsoever. In spite of the 'risk of self-congratulatory *entre-soi*'⁷⁴ that cannot be ignored, *Nuit debout* still represents the perfect example of how the relationship between culture and labour organisation and struggle might evolve in the current political context, thus opening up innovative ways to engage with militant action.⁷⁵ Ruffin has received The César Award for Best Documentary Film. Then to top it all, bridging the gap between militant cinema and politics, he was the victorious candidate representing a coalition of left-wing parties⁷⁶ in one of the Somme constituencies for the legislative elections held in June 2017. Last but not least, he has requested that his salary as a deputy be in compliance with the legal minimum wage.⁷⁷

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since the Lip saga. Viallet's *La mise à mort du travail* (2009) shows evidence that conflicts between employers and employees have increasingly been tackled as isolated cases since the end of the 1980s. It has led to a process of psychologisation that has concealed the systemic sociological and political issues at stake. As exceptional as it was, the time when the camera was handed to the workers so that they could film their own conditions and create their own stories is a bygone era (see Section One). None of the directors of the contemporary documentaries explored has done so. On the contrary, they have total control of all aspects of filming. With all due respect for their work, one may wonder

⁷⁴ Haski, P. (2016) 'Nuit debout protests are confirmation that France political system is broken', *The Guardian* [online] 13 April. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/13/nuit-debout-france-occupy-wall-street-1968> [Accessed 04 September].

⁷⁵ See Rimbart, P. (2016) 'Contester sans modération', *Le Monde diplomatique* [online] May Edition. Available from: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2016/05/RIMBERT/55467> [Accessed 04 September 2017].

⁷⁶ La France insoumise, EELV (Europe Ecologie Les Verts) and the Communist Party.

⁷⁷ Garbay, A. (2017) 'Elu à l'Assemblée, François Ruffin veut "se payer" au Smic', *Le Figaro* [online] 19 June. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/social/2017/06/19/20011-20170619ARTFIG00204-depute-francois-ruffin-veut-etre-paye-au-smic.php?pagination=7> [Accessed 26 June 2017].

if the role of such ‘whistleblowers’ can be considered a substitute for a decline in the influence of the unions as effective and legitimate counter-powers. As for the workers, do their reported struggles not depend a little bit too much on a few individuals’ bold initiatives? A persistent question that also applies to the film-makers and writers’ works explored in the following chapters.

In most cases, disputes in which management’s decisions and methods of intimidation are called into question by employees result in procedures of systematic legalisation. For instance, in *La Destruction* (Viallet: 2009, Part Three), a group of former cashiers from Hypermarché referred their grievance to the labour tribunal after being sacked on the grounds of serious offences. They are accused of theft and were caught red-handed by the surveillance system in place (CCTV or security guards). Each of the five plaintiffs lost their job following the same accusation: a few bars of unpaid-for chewing-gum discovered at the bottom of their own shopping bags. Blaming the management for having framed them, they are adamant that the items found had been intentionally placed in their bags.⁷⁸ As a matter of fact, the frequency of analogous disputes has overstretched the legal representatives, who can barely cope with the number of indictments that have to be dealt with. In France, there is only one factory inspector for every 10,000 employees.⁷⁹ Most of the employees have also referred their grievances to *les conseils de prud’hommes*,⁸⁰ which have dealt with three times the number of cases since the end of the 1980s (200,000 cases in 2011 alone).⁸¹ Reading between the lines, such an increase shows the profound changes associated with the effects of desolidarization as well as the real weight of the trade unions in the private sector that, according to their critics, tend to ‘operate within the status quo rather than challenging it’⁸² (see Section One of Chapter One). Their role is not about mounting a coordinated challenge to the new work organisations but about

⁷⁸ However, employee Kim claims that she was made redundant because she kept talking to her colleague Chantal who had started a CGT branch in the supermarket. The outcome of the dispute depends on whether the so-called troublesome former employees are seeking revenge or really are the victims of a plot orchestrated by the management. Besides, Magali, a head-cashier who was also made redundant after a prolonged period of sick leave, has openly given her support to the five employees. In the light of this somatisation disorder, her corporeality has been directly affected by the traumatic experience. Suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), she has since lost her job and her hair in the process.

⁷⁹ Polloni, C. (2013) ‘Mathieu, inspecteur du travail: "Le burn-out, c’est un chagrin d’honneur"’, *Rue89* [online] 20 November. Available from: <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2013/11/20/mathieu-inspecteur-travail-burnout-cest-chagrin-dhonneur-247520> [Accessed 02 March 2014].

⁸⁰ French equivalent of Acas in the UK.

⁸¹ *Prud’hommes* (2011) Directed by Stéphane Goël [Documentary Film]. France: Blaq Out.

⁸² O’Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 37.

giving guidance throughout the process, which therefore allows the plaintiff to regain their besmirched honour, a sense of closure, and to obtain financial indemnity by way of compensation; three rather sizeable factors insofar as they draw a line on an injustice that was done.

As we shall see in the closing section of this chapter, the emergence of unorthodox forms of resistance from ex-workers and ex-managers, some of whom were made redundant and have decided to turn their back on the world of work, is what differentiates Carles, Coello and Goxe's *Attention danger travail* (2003) from its counterparts. It is undeniable that the interviewees all share unrepentant happiness mixed with solace however we shall now discuss whether they are to be identified as 'deserters', 'social conscientious objectors' or perhaps an intermediate status.

Ambiguous resistance

Marxist author Paul Lafargue considered the refusal to work as a radical political choice that can be justified against any form of exploitation or enslavement. In his monograph *Le Droit à la paresse*, published in 1880, he based his viewpoint on the fact that work remains a bourgeois conception and therefore a source of alienation for the non-bourgeois classes.⁸³ Searching for connections, some viewers may identify with these 'deserters'/'social conscientious objectors'. If such a process of identification establishes a bond which makes them feel less isolated and guilty, it operates as leverage and empowers them to defend and justify their alternative lifestyle against the pressure of the social norm. These testimonies can therefore enfranchise individuals and give them the courage to go part-time, hand in their notice or restart from scratch by leaving a full-time and secure but alienating job, regardless of the backlash that might follow. Such a process of *déculpabilisation*⁸⁴ is also analysed and glorified in the bestseller *Bonjour Paresse* by contemporary psychoanalyst and economist Corinne Maier.⁸⁵ One can argue that making such decisions is questionable, given that millions of people are unemployed and desperate for work. However, as Loïc Wacquant states in *Attention danger travail* (2003):

Je pense qu'on a vraiment des blocages mentaux très importants, l'incapacité par exemple de penser l'activité de vie en dehors de la forme salariale, de la forme marchande. [...] On a peine à imaginer l'instauration d'un revenu inconditionnel du citoyen qui ne soit pas dépendante de l'accomplissement d'un travail. Pourquoi on a peine à imaginer l'existence sociale qui ne passerait

⁸³ Lafargue, P. (1999) *Le Droit à la paresse* (Paris: Editions Allia).

⁸⁴ Moral buck-passing (translated from French).

⁸⁵ Maier, C. (2004) *Bonjour Paresse* (Paris: Editions Michalon).

pas par le travail? Il faut se dire que c'est possible, c'est organisable. [...] On est revenu à un discours productiviste, de sacralisation du travail, qui est nécessaire justement pour faire accepter le travail dégradé et dégradant.⁸⁶

Yet the weakness of the argument in the film is that there is no middle ground, no other alternatives than the alienation induced by the new work organisations on the one hand and the joys and rewards provided by turning one's back on work for good on the other.⁸⁷ The world of work is depicted as a totalising negative experience; a polemical stance clearly expressed by the film directors. By withdrawing from it, have the self-made outcasts not withdrawn from that of politics, in the Aristotelian sense of the word,⁸⁸ insofar as their choice of life is only a matter of pure and individualistic choices? In other words, how will these 'absent' citizens contribute to society if they decide to remain at its margins?

On the contrary, it is important to stress that if a majority of the interviewees have turned their back on work, the latter had turned its back on them by making them redundant in the first place. The trauma lingers on. They justify their decision to stop working, or refusing to work again, with different reasons, i.e. attempting to reconstruct their self-esteem and relative freedom as they can dedicate their regained time to more gratifying activities, e.g. gardening, reading or socialising.⁸⁹ Work has become a no-go zone, a risk they cannot take anymore.⁹⁰ The interviewees who live on social benefits have taught themselves to become immune to the expected stigmatisation and victimisation that such a frugal and assisted social status is associated with. If some glorify a state of social assistance, hinting at sporadic moonlighting to make ends meet, this is the price to pay for their emancipation from the vicissitudes of the world of work and for going under the radar, e.g. the ex-worker who was made redundant and has not worked for years shows some pride in being able to profusely read great Russian novelists and shares her guilty pleasure of taking afternoon naps. Interestingly, were those 'activities' not exclusive privileges attached to the idle classes? Has therefore a form of partial cultural appropriation not taken

⁸⁶ Loïc Wacquant quoted from *Attention danger travail* (2003) Directed by Pierre Carles, Christophe Coello & Stéphane Goxe [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁸⁷ For instance, call centres in which a computerised system of control allows the management to monitor every employee in real time, and intervene on the spot, either to stimulate, provide advice or be critical at any stage during their shift.

⁸⁸ Because he is a social creature gifted with moral reasoning and the power of speech, man is considered a 'political animal' by Aristotle (384-322 BC).

⁸⁹ See Rousselet, J. (1974) *L'Allergie au travail* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

⁹⁰ Caviglioni, D. (2017) 'Peut-on être "contre le travail"?', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 21 March. Available from: <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20170519.OBS9645/peut-on-etre-contre-le-travail.html> [Accessed 22 May 2017].

place? Moreover, one may posit that her choice of life is inspired by Raoul Vaneigem's *Le Livre des plaisirs*, which stresses the importance of freeing oneself from the neo-liberal model by giving one's pleasures free rein, which is considered a new form of radicalism.⁹¹ Another interviewee named P., who has always lived on social benefits, justifies his choice by remembering his hard-working father who used to be away from home for several days, taking his 'gamelle' with him.⁹² P. displays his happiness, mentions how fulfilling his social life is and sees himself as undefeated despite the disapproval of his family. He is adamant not to follow his father's footsteps. He certainly shows strong resistance against social pressure and conformism, but by bartering alienation and exploitation for a frugal freedom sustained by state funds, a view radicalised by *le Comité invisible*, an anonymous group of contemporary anti-capitalist writers, which states:

L'appareil de production présent est donc, d'un côté, cette gigantesque machine à mobiliser psychiquement et physiquement, à pomper l'énergie des humains devenus excédentaires, de l'autre il est cette machine à trier qui alloue la survie aux subjectivités conformes et laisse choir tous les "individus à risque", tous ceux qui incarnent un autre emploi de la vie et, par là, lui résistent.⁹³

As laudable as they may be in terms of self-preservation and individual choice against neo-liberalism, considering these activities as an expression of resistance is debatable. Some may argue that the whole initiative remains in total contradiction to the fact of being financially supported by a culture of dependence. Notwithstanding that the majority of people on social benefits do not find solace in their condition, can one be identified as a social pariah and conscientious objector at the same time? As Philippe Lafosse clearly explains:

Le film de Pierre Carles, Christophe Coello et Stéphane Goxe n'est en rien un appel au chacun pour soi, voire au parasitisme. Bon nombre de ceux et celles qui refusent "la peur qui mutile" et le conditionnement de l'économie libérale s'investissent pour eux-mêmes et les autres, au nom d'autres richesses.⁹⁴

The argument cuts both ways. In that respect, researching the true cost of social welfare dependence turns out to be a sensitive ideological matter which varies depending on one's political viewpoint. Living on social benefits or the minimum wage is indeed a very different matter in terms of income and standard of living as shown in the graph below. Furthermore the commonplace perception that the

⁹¹ Vaneigem, R. (1979) *Le Livre des plaisirs* (Paris: Editeur Encre).

⁹² An object which is part of the working-class imagery (and also a dog feeding bowl).

⁹³ Le comité invisible (2007) *L'insurrection qui vient* (Paris: La fabrique éditions), p. 36.

⁹⁴ Lafosse, P. (2003) 'Déserteurs du productivisme', *Le Monde diplomatique* [online] October Edition. Available from: <http://www.homme-moderne.org/rienfoutre/attention/diplo0310.html> [Accessed 23 February 2015].

implementation of a universal income would discourage people from working is proved to be inaccurate according to prominent economists Ioana Marinescu and Thomas Piketty.⁹⁵

	Ressources mensuelles (dont APL) pour un couple sans emploi ni allocations chômage (RSA socle)	Ressources mensuelles (dont APL) pour un couple avec un SMIC à 1100€ mensuel net (+ RSA activité)
Sans enfant avec aide au logement (APL)	609(RSA)+367(APL)= 978€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux gaz-électricité	1100+191(RSA activité)+172(APL) = 1463€ pas de droit à la CMUC
Sans enfant et sans APL	725€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux	1100+307(RSA activité) = 1407€ pas de droit à la CMUC
Avec deux enfants et APL et Allocations familiales=127€	871+483(APL) = 1354€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux	1100+127(AF)+327(RSA activité)+368(APL) = 1922€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux
Avec deux enfants et sans APL. AF=127€	1015€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux	1100+127+470(RSA activité) = 1697€ + droit à la CMUC et aux tarifs sociaux

Source: *ATD Quart Monde* (2012) 'Pauvreté, immigration, assistanat, fraude... : cassons les idées reçues', [online] April. Available from: <http://osibouake.org/?Pauvrete-immigration-assistanat> [Accessed 28 July 2014].

Is a fundamental point missed in the film insofar as much more diverse ways of balancing one's professional and private lives are accessible? In retrospect, we shall argue here that such alternatives did not exist or were rather marginal in the late 1990s and early 2000s in France, the period during which the interviews took place. The situations in which bartering for a more precarious professional position which brings with it a happier life balance instead of total job security have gradually emerged and become commonplace throughout the last decade.⁹⁶ Last but not least, a clear manifestation of resistance truly characterised the 50-year-old machine operator's discourse who was made redundant and then asked after a period of time by the same multinational company to resume his work under new conditions, such as a 20% salary cut. This is how he justifies his refusal to comply: 'Moi, j'ai choisi de m'en tirer avec le système D. [...] Et vous espérez que l'usine se remplisse de chômeurs, à

⁹⁵ Marinescu, I. (2017) 'Non, le revenu universel ne décourage pas du travail', *Libération* [online] 06 February. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/02/06/non-le-revenu-universel-ne-decourage-pas-le-travail_1546717 [Accessed 08 February 2017].

⁹⁶ Brouze, E. (2014) 'Salariés, ils ont choisi de travailler moins pour "profiter de la vie"', *Rue89* [online] 16 January. Available from: <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2014/01/16/salaries-ils-ont-choisi-travailler-moins-profiter-vie-248293> [Accessed 28 July 2014].

la recherche de cette merveilleuse opportunité de travailler. Mais nous, pendant ce temps-là, depuis que vous nous avez virés, nous avons appris à vivre sans travailler.’⁹⁷ His resistance is the combination of a sense of decisiveness, irony and pride, with perhaps a pinch of revenge against the ruling class. The rules of the game are all of a sudden reversed. It is almost an unequivocal invitation for the Marcusean ‘absolute refusal’, that of rejecting any interaction with an economic and social system which is hostile and threatening.⁹⁸ Facing the camera, the exploited ‘fires’ the exploiter by announcing that he is no longer part of the latter’s reserve army of cheap labour. He performs an awkward yet deliberate act of militancy that is overtly political in many aspects. All this also confirms that the search for an emancipatory solution has become more individualistic, with or without the intervention of an intermediary body. However when the individual (real or fictional) has succeeded in obtaining their own emancipation, and when the process that has led them to reach their goal is outlined in a film or a text, their experience becomes accessible to any viewer or reader who can in their turn benefit from it.

Alternatives

Finally, the sequel to *Attention danger travail* (Carles, Coello & Goxe: 2003), *Volem rien foutre al país* outlines a wide variety of professional alternatives which shows that it is possible to break from the mass-consumption model on which capitalism is based.⁹⁹ The counter-arguments are mainly addressed by politicians’ soothing and patronising discourses in synch with those of the Medef regarding the value of work. The striking opening scene stretches back to the then Prime Minister Georges Pompidou’s televised appearance, which was broadcast in June 1967. It is at the vanguard of European market liberalisation whilst openly questioning the legitimacy of social protection. He warns:

Le problème de la concurrence à l’intérieur du Marché Commun est un problème sérieux, un problème grave. [...] Vous avez pendant 50 ans vécu à l’abri de protections inadmissibles. [...] Nous vivrons, et l’économie française, et les industriels et les commerçants français doivent vivre désormais dans la préoccupation permanente. Il s’agit de se dire qu’ils sont toujours menacés par la concurrence, qu’il faut toujours qu’ils fassent mieux [...] et c’est ça la loi de la concurrence et la raison d’être du libéralisme. [...] Nous serons donc en risque permanent, et le gouvernement en est

⁹⁷ *Attention danger travail* (2003) Directed by Pierre Carles, Christophe Coello & Stéphane Goxe [Documentary Film] op. cit.

⁹⁸ Marcuse, H. (1964) *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon), pp. 255-256.

⁹⁹ *Volem rien foutre al país* (2007) Directed by Pierre Carles, Christophe Coello & Stéphane Goxe [Documentary Film]. France: CP Productions. *Nous ne voulons rien foutre au pays* (translated from Occitan).

parfaitement conscient. Son rôle est de diminuer ces risques parfois, mais son rôle n'est certainement pas d'inviter les gens à la paresse en leur créant de nouvelles protections.

The same discourse was to be rehashed until the present time by prominent conservative and left of the centre politicians presenting themselves as 'modernisers'. Pompidou's speech is followed by real footage of the burning and ransacking of a couple of head offices of the Medef by angry workers whose jobs are under threat. These drastic actions triggered a public outcry from the media, politicians and also the CGT leader, who was determined to praise the union's peaceful initiatives such as organising picnics, therefore distancing himself and being visibly overwhelmed by the spontaneous and more aggressive turn of events. Yet contemporary 'whistleblower' Carles puts forward a more controversial viewpoint by presenting such a growing radicalism as a fair way to turn the tables against the damages caused by on-going restructurings and outsourcings. In parallel to and echoing Pompidou's earlier statement, the sequence in which a social benefit claimant goes through an extremely meticulous interrogation, having to justify every single *centime* that could tilt the final decision about whether he is entitled to benefits or not, is also revelatory.

All in all, *Volem rien foutre al país* (2007) offers solutions and alternatives. The convincing testimonies of reappropriation of work through diverse, inventive and successful experiences show that another model of society, both ecological and free from the shackles of the market laws, is within grasp. Echoing Wacquant's viewpoint above, Paul Ariès also deconstructs the myth of work as a fundamental element of our activities by boldly stating:

Il faut en finir avec la pensée que le travail serait au centre de nos existences. Ce qu'il faut revendiquer aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas plus de pouvoir d'achat mais un revenu garanti (tel que le Smic) qui permettrait à chacun de vivre de façon frugale mais certaine. [...] Remplaçons le slogan "travailler plus pour gagner plus" par "moins de biens et plus de liens". [...] Il s'agit de porter un diagnostic sur le monde: 20% des humains que nous sommes s'approprient 86% des ressources planétaires. [...] Il faut en finir avec l'illusion d'une société d'abondance, il faut en finir avec le culte du travail.¹⁰⁰

The punchy documentary exalts another world, emancipated from the binary vision of a professional life marred by exploitation and casualization or state handouts. If some receive a subsidy from the government, others are entirely autonomous. Thus the film has the merit of giving those who have decided to live at

¹⁰⁰ Arte TV (2014) 'Sommes-nous faits pour travailler?', Arte TV [online video] 17 June. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTaXKnQnGCQ> [Accessed 05 November 2015]; Reverchon, A. (2016) 'Le revenu universel, généalogie d'une utopie', *Le Monde* [online] 21 April. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2016/04/21/le-revenu-universel-genealogie-d-une-utopie_4906393_3232.html [Accessed 30 April 2016].

the margins of capitalist society, and who are systematically stigmatised by the latter and its propaganda tools, the possibility to express their own views whilst being creative through non-conformist models that break away from submission and consumption (squatters, members of a commune, self-sufficient alternative farming).¹⁰¹ Thus, addressing the issues related to the gradual dismantling of social welfare, a pig breeder admits that he and his fellow-farmers find it hard to identify themselves with the nationwide social struggles related to pensions and social security,¹⁰² given that they have opted for marginality and therefore favour new forms of cooperation. As Le Goff points out: 'Entre l'autogestion, la démocratie partielle, du local, du quotidien et les orientations et les choix politiques au plan d'ensemble de la société, le lien n'a rien de naturel et de spontané.'¹⁰³ Living in autarchy, they have chosen not to confront the established system but to overlook it instead.

Conclusion of Chapter Two

The selected documentaries explored in this chapter share the same purpose, which is to shed light on exploitative managerial practices that hamper today's workplace. Supported by facts, figures, authentic testimonies and through methodical decortications, they have demonstrated how deindustrialisation has pushed the working class into the social wilderness whilst the tertiary sector has expanded along with a normalisation of precariousness, panoptic forms of control and a weakening of any attempt at opposition. They have also brought to light the solitude of the worker at the mercy of excessive Taylorist and Toyotist constraints imposed by the employers, which has the potential to inflict serious health damage against the backdrop of deunionisation.

One might argue that their meticulous reappraisal of defeat lacks alternative perspectives and runs the risk of consolidating social miserabilism. In contrast, *Merci patron!* (Ruffin: 2016) and the subsequent *Nuit debout* protest prove otherwise by avoiding defeatism and overtly outlining clear aspects of unorthodox resistance. Fundamentally there has to be more than a series of opportunistic reactions and

¹⁰¹ See Gorz, A (2004) *Métamorphoses du travail, quête du sens* (Paris: Folio Essais).

¹⁰² *Loi Fillon* on pensions implemented in 2003 by the Raffarin government (2002-2004), which modified the pension system by increasing the retirement age.

¹⁰³ Le Goff, J-P. (1998), *Mai 68, l'héritage impossible*, op. cit., p. 452.

perilous alternatives with regard to deglobalisation hypotheses,¹⁰⁴ which is precisely the case in certain documentaries, e.g. *Volem rien foutre al país* (Carles, Coello & Goxe: 2007) in which avant-garde modes of production are examined.

Film-makers and novelists also play a significant role in decrying class exploitation and exposing the shortcomings of the workplace through characterisation and storylines as the following last two chapters demonstrate. In both cases, they have re-established a pedagogy and praxis of resistance despite increasing neo-liberal hegemony. In Chapter Three, we shall examine the social significance of fiction films wherein the return of politics via workplace control and resistance challenges the neo-liberal current arrangement.

¹⁰⁴ See Chrisafis, A. (2015) 'Right-wing 'new reactionaries' stir up trouble among French intellectuals', *The Guardian* [online] 09 October. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/09/right-wing-new-reactionaries-stir-up-trouble-among-french-intellectuals> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

Chapter Three

The return of politics in *cinéma du labeur*

- 1. Intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts in characterisation**
 - 2. Survival of the fittest: Places of work and the law of the gun/market**
 - 3. Corporate secrets and lies exposed through film**
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In *Class Struggles in France*, Jim Wolfreys writes that ‘France in the 1990s has seen a tremendous backlash against the liberal orthodoxy of the 1980s, witnessed in the remarkable sales of books critical of the free market, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Misère du monde* and Viviane Forrester’s *L’Horreur économique*; [...] and in the return of class as a subject for French cinema’.¹ It is true that throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the subject of class was sidelined by two dominant genres: ‘the heritage film’ (Higson, 1993) and the *cinéma du look*. The former is characterised by nostalgic and classical adaptations based on historical and literary and/or personalities. Romanticized storytelling and excessive melodramatic markers are the driving factors of the narrative. The role played by their respective historical context remains mainly illustrative and visually entertaining. These costume dramas were big successes at the box-office, with famous stars², e.g. Gérard Depardieu in Andrzej Wajda’s *Danton* (1983), Isabelle Adjani in Bruno Nuytten’s *Camille Claudel* (1988), Catherine Deneuve in Régis Wargnier’s Oscar-winning film’s *Indochine* (1991) and Claude Berri’s adaptation of *Germinal* (1993) that is ‘emptied of any attack on capitalism and populated by stereotypes’ (Scala, 1993: 25). As for *cinéma du look*, Guy Austin observes that it ‘is characterised not by any collective ideology but rather by a technical mastery of the medium, a cinephile tendency to cite from other films, and a spectacular visual style (le look)’.³ Akin to Jim Stark, James Dean’s protagonist in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), rebellious and marginal characters also define the genre. They resemble chic-scruffy neo-punks within a decorum

¹ Wolfreys, J. (1999) *Class Struggles in France*, International Socialism n° 84, p. 57.

² We shall see in this chapter that film stars such as Marion Cotillard also participate in films *du labeur* therefore opening the genre to a larger audience.

³ Austin, G. (1996) *Contemporary French Cinema, An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 119.

society, the products of an existential and political vacuum.⁴ This cinéma is characterised by absurdist humour and derision. (Powrie and Reader, 2007: 148-149) Bathed in a romantic nihilism that ignores the social realities of the 1980s and the 1990s, it is pure escapism from the issues of these decades that are more or less intentionally swept under the carpet whilst economic globalisation and cultural uniformity prevail.

Thus, form conveys an ideology that does not say its name. Its rebels, akin to post teenagers in crisis, are tolerable for the established order as they also tend to be harmless products of advertising and TV.⁵ Its lack of latitude in terms of reflection on class and politics validates a society whose members are defined through self-absorption and a propensity to presentism. It is all about drifters, alternative lifestyles, existential suffering; it is all about the comforting myth and retreat of cocooning marginality. In synch with the post-May 68 ideological disillusionment and the emergence of *les nouveaux philosophes* who broke with Marxism in the 1970s and who, 'ayant fait de la lutte contre le totalitarisme leur principal combat, n'ont pas vu venir ou n'ont pas su reconnaître la reprise en main libérale du monde occidental',⁶ the archetypal characters of *cinéma du look* have bartered political engagement for some sort of Rimbaudian liberty. In this respect, Jean-Pierre Le Goff writes:

Se trouvent alors convoqués pêle-mêle le Juif errant, le fou, le vagabond, l'ouvrier instable, le chômeur, l'indigent, le délinquant, [...] ou encore l'artiste et l'enfant... Au-delà de leurs différences, ces nouveaux innocents de la révolte ont un point commun: ils ne veulent pas être "étatisés" et se choisissent sans maître. Par rapport à tout projet politique, cette plèbe apparaît sans mémoire et sans avenir.⁷

However, the excitement was short-lived. Politics and social issues were not long to resurface. *Cinéma du look* and the 'heritage film' therefore precede *cinéma du labeur*. This partly emerges in reaction to the latter's supremacy of form over substance as it undeniably disenchant its predecessors and reconnects with *cinéma réaliste* of the 1930s which was dominated by directors such as Marcel Carné, Jean Renoir, René Clair and Jean Vigo in France alone. *Cinéma du labeur* also recycles aspects of the French New Wave that characterised the late 1950s and the 1960s, of

⁴ See *Subway* (1985) Directed by Luc Besson [Film]. France: Gaumont.

⁵ See Séguéla, J. (1992) *Fils de Pub* (Paris: Editions Flammarion) and Hayward, S. (1993) *French National Cinema* (London & New York: Routledge).

⁶ Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (1999) *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 85.

⁷ Le Goff, J-P. (1998) *Mai 68, L'héritage impossible*, op. cit., p. 415.

which the interpenetration of politics and film is a prime example.⁸ It has gained momentum by addressing in a heterogeneous manner the negative impacts of neo-liberalism on the workforce through dramatisation and characterisation. It represents a wake-up call insofar as mainstream politics is discredited and needs an alternative and sustainable medium which tackles the negative effects of globalisation with a clear focus on the workplace. It is also important to state that films about class as an antidote to neo-liberal control are not restricted to France. To name but a few, prominent directors such as Ken Loach (UK) and the Dardenne brothers (Belgium) not only have contributed to the reassertion of class – and the workplace – as a core subject but have relentlessly criticised the liberal orthodoxy for decades. Their inspirational influence on the emergence of a *cinéma du labeur* ‘made in France’ remains unquestionable insofar as the critical trend of exposing the excesses of the free market in films regained fresh momentum from the mid-1990s onwards.

What the above contemporary genres (apart from *cinéma réaliste*) have in common is a notable absence of an overarching ideological backbone whereas a new reading of politics has clearly re-emerged in *cinéma du labeur*. Still, questions remain on how to label and define the trend, which cannot be considered an artistic movement per se. Despite recurrent cinematic similarities in terms of thematics across films, there are no such things as specific aesthetic or technical criteria that have to be met. Thus what can be perceived as a weakness could, on the contrary, turn out to represent an asset, given that the absence of any ‘school’ guarantees a certain degree of fierce independence for the film-makers. As Raymond Williams remarks, ‘If you’re not in a church you’re not worried about heresies.’⁹ One may consider that viewing these works as a substitute for politics might be a step too far; however there is a strong argument that they represent a critical platform for reflecting on the world of work, as well as re-instating a political *aufhebung*¹⁰ within society. In that respect, outlining their role and social significance, Christophe Dejours states that:

⁸ The end of the *Trente Glorieuses* (1945-1975) was characterised by a decline in terms of radical politics in the aftermath of the May 1968 revolt which failed to concretise the anti-establishment movement it was driven by. The period was depicted with deepest irony by directors Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin in *Tout va bien* (1972), a film that captures the zeitgeist of the era. Paradoxically, the will for radical change was still preponderant, yet deprived of apt political organisations able to live up to its proteiform demands.

⁹ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁰ Sublation (translated from German). It is a philosophical concept which was developed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The emergence of a new idea resolves the conflict between two opposed or contrasting things or ideas which are both preserved and transcended.

Ces réalisateurs ont compris que le système ne fonctionne pas sans le consentement des salariés. Ils montrent les conflits internes de chacun plutôt qu'ils ne définissent un ennemi commun. L'espace public est désormais dominé par le discours publicitaire, le discours de l'entreprise. D'où l'importance de ces cinéastes, ces professionnels de l'image, qui rapatrient le réel, le travail et sa souffrance parfois, pour rééquilibrer le répertoire de l'espace public.¹¹

There is nothing either bombastic or experimental under the loose umbrella of *cinéma du labeur*, no room for artificiality apart from a few rare exceptions. The film-makers prioritise social honesty even if 'no film can represent reality. It must therefore be presentational rather than representational.' (Monaco, 1981: 336) Interestingly and paradoxically, the films explored in this chapter have a lot (in terms of thematics articulated within the place of work, class, and at the risk of contradicting Dejours, a common enemy: global neo-liberalism) as well as little (in terms of cinematography and use of genres) in common. Like their counterparts in Chapters Two and Four (wherein the workplace will be examined within literary fiction), they don't embody the figure of the post-war left-wing grand artist or intellectual from whom an answer to every issue was implicitly expected by the rest of us.¹² It neither glorifies the revolt as the only alternative nor systematically depicts a Manichean treatment of class-related issues. More pragmatic rather than dogmatic, it tackles the latter in a more surgical and eclectic manner. The proteiform genre is prone to fluctuation and is therefore adaptable and adjustable. It borrows from other genres and also morphs into sub-genres; an eclectism that perhaps ensures its longevity. None of the films explored here is necessarily a cinematographic political tract per se. In most cases, the trivial events clearly outrank the collective movements and the return of politics often occurs by the backdoor of individuality, determination and self-emancipation, which might be a matter of profound disappointment for those who live for a brighter future. The partial recuperation brought about by the creation of *le Prix du roman d'entreprise et du travail* for literature, as outlined in Chapter Four, is non-existent as far as *cinéma du labeur* is concerned. From the slick offices of La Défense to remote deindustrialised mining regions, provincial factories and sleepy towns, voices of the forgotten emerge light years away from consensual, tasteful and highly

¹¹ Faure, S. (2006) 'Cinéma du labeur', *Libération* [online] 13 February. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2006/02/13/cinema-du-labeur_29771 [Accessed 28 March 2015].

¹² Jacoby, R. (1999) *The End of Utopia, Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*, (New York: Basic Books), pp. 116-117; Le Goff, J-P. (1998) *Mai 68, l'héritage, impossible*, op. cit., p. 343; see also Noudelmann, F. (2015) *Le génie du mensonge* (Paris: Editions Max Milo).

stylised Frenchness depicted in worldwide successful films, e.g. the romantic comedy *Amélie*.¹³ As Elizabeth Ezra observes:

France has always boasted a strong counterculture, one that repeatedly challenges long-standing tradition of centralization and normalization. [...]. The developments of the 1990s are also a reminder of the flexibility that operates between cinema and the wider society, as films simultaneously mirrored and informed the reality that they portrayed, by contributing to the debate on contemporary society, national identities, and representation.¹⁴

To name but a few, in *Wild Side* (2005) we have chosen to explore the narrative of marginal and illegal workers in search of their identity. Their stories are the centre-piece of a globalised France spanning from the backstreets of Paris to the derelict mining region of Picardy.¹⁵ Rurality and its retained landmarks and sense of preservation of work are the substance of *Le Fils de l'épicier* (2007).¹⁶ The entrepreneurial project of a working-class Tunisian family as an allegory of France's unadapted republican values is tackled in *La Graine et le mulet* (2007).¹⁷ The suicide of an employee triggers the intrigue of an action-packed thriller in *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (2005).¹⁸ Finally, *La Question humaine* examines through a magnifying glass the links between the corporate world philosophy and way of thinking with some elements linked to Nazism and the Holocaust (2009).¹⁹ Given that our goal is not to cover all the fiction films related to the subject, unfortunately some contemporary directors, e.g. Robert Guédiguian, will be overlooked. More importantly, *cinéma du labeur* is still a viable genre in progress and will remain so for quite some time before it achieves its rightful place in the history of French film without hopefully abandoning its 'in progress' status.

We will now examine how the intricacies of plot, subtext, characters' moral traits and issues *du labeur* developed in fiction films offer a relevant and powerful critique of globalisation and how they are explicitly or implicitly anchored within class and politics. Through a selection of key films where the world of work plays a preponderant role in terms of thematics and character development, our aim here is to probe in detail how 'little' suffering and resilience in the workplace can be

¹³ *Amélie* (2001) Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet [Film]. France: France 3 Cinéma.

¹⁴ Ezra, E. (2004) *European Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 297.

¹⁵ *Wild Side* (2005) Directed by Sébastien Lifshitz [Film]. France: uniFrance Films.

¹⁶ *Le Fils de l'épicier* (2007) Directed by Eric Guirado [Film]. France: Les Films du Losange.

¹⁷ *La Graine et le mulet* (2007) Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche [Film]. France: Pathé Distribution.

¹⁸ *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (2005) Directed by Fabienne Godet [Film] op. cit.

¹⁹ *La Question humaine* (2008) Directed by Nicolas Klotz [Film] op. cit.

reconverted into politics, starting with an examination of the leading characters²⁰ of *Ressources humaines* and *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*.²¹ We will then explore four fictions that share the same goal, which is to reveal and question a country whose identity crisis seems to be stretched between irreconcilable aspirations as social cohesion has receded from the cities, and the countryside and wherein the power struggle between control and resistance keeps redefining places of work.

1. Intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts in characterisation

The fragment is not self-contained nor self-sustaining. It emerges from the shattering of something larger, from the loss of social connectivity, shared values and intergenerational continuity. Characters within it have no access to an overarching explanatory vision or to an elaborated politics. Their struggles and suffering pass above all through the body and are constantly threatened with meaninglessness. (O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, p. 128).

In the 1990s, the vacuum left by the decline of Marxism and trade unionism as well as the internalization of individualistic values which were exacerbated by mass unemployment shaped a place of work at the mercy of the market. The consequences of such a shift are tackled in many films. In this respect, Tangui Perron states that 'dans les années 90, les professions intellectuelles sont devenues plus sensibles à la crise, qui est plus voyante et touche aussi les cadres [...]. Les mouvements sociaux de 1995 ont beaucoup joué: les gauches se sont repositionnées par rapport à la crise et au travail. Le jeune cinéma français des années 90 a été marqué par cet ancrage social.'²² The theatrical release of Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines* (English title: *Human Resources*)²³ in 1999 represented a landmark for 'cinema of the workplace' whilst attracting a relatively wider audience in France and abroad.²⁴ The film brought the workplace and class struggle back to the forefront. An intrinsic sobriety results from the use of only one professional actor (Jalil Lespert in the role of Franck, a trainee executive freshly graduated from a prestigious Parisian business school) alongside

²⁰ See Schmidt, V. (2012) *A Writer's Guide to Characterization, Archetypes, Heroic Journeys, and Other Elements of Dynamic Character Development* (USA: Paperback).

²¹ *Ressources humaines* (1999) Directed by Laurent Cantet [Film]. France: Haut et Court Distribution; *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (2004) Directed by Jean-Marc Moutout [Film]. France: TS Productions.

²² Faure, S. (2006) 'Cinéma du labeur', *Libération* [online] 13 February. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/economie/2006/02/13/cinema-du-labeur_29771 [Accessed 28 March 2015], op. cit.

²³ *Ressources humaines* (1999) Directed by Laurent Cantet [Film] op. cit.

²⁴ 232 000 viewers in France alone when the film was released in 1999.

real life employees, which fosters a sense of *cinéma vérité* or *cinéma direct*²⁵ that shares some analogies with the documentary films explored in Chapter Two. As Gilles Marchand, co-screenwriter of the film, comments:

Laurent a alors réalisé que tout le monde, les cinéastes compris, se comporte désormais comme si la classe ouvrière n’existait plus [...]. On n’en parle pas. On ne la montre plus. Tout est venu de ce désir de filmer le travail et les travailleurs. [...] Il a été l’un des premiers à montrer, dans une fiction, l’organisation d’une lutte syndicale, pire encore, une réunion entière entre patrons et syndicalistes! Telle est la vraie transgression: non pas filmer le travail mais l’inclure dans une fiction.²⁶

The film clearly touches a chord with viewers rather eager to side with the blue-collar workers as the plot develops and as resistance against the law of the market becomes an imperative. Considered either a new dawn or ‘another’ swan song of militant cinema, depending on one’s viewpoint, it is noteworthy that the film, like many others, does not escape such a dilemma. I remember seeing the multi-award-winning feature at the British Film Institute and was really moved by the warm welcome it received from the audience who, surprised by the ending that tilts in favour of the united workers against the white-collar managers, pure representatives of neo-liberalism, applauded enthusiastically when the lights were turned on. To put it simply, it was all about celebrating class rehabilitation. The hopeful outcome of the closing scene depicting the strike and the occupation by the workers must have had something to do with such a reaction as happy endings and a return to class solidarity in film had been scarce for quite some time, thus speaking volumes about the social reality of the late 1990s.

In other words, viewers welcomed the return of politics and social issues in cinema through the trial of strength between double-crosser Franck and his bosses. Officially, the protagonist’s first assignment is to implement the 35-hour working week. The implementation of the 35-hour working week complicated matters and, unsurprisingly, it was and still is the *bête noire* of the right.²⁷ That said, if it was

²⁵ *Cinéma vérité* (‘truth cinema’) is a specific style of documentary filmmaking that was initiated by Jean Rouch in France in the 1960s. It combines the use of the camera and improvisation in order to show individuals in everyday situations, with authentic dialogue and genuine action. (See Roberts, J. (2017) ‘What is cinéma vérité?’, *Indie Film Hustle* [online] 16 May. Available from: <https://indiefilmhustle.com/cinema-verite/> [Accessed 07 July 2017]).

²⁶ In Blottière, M. (2007) ‘Le cinéma se met au travail’, *Télérama* [online] 08 September. Available from: http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/15669-le_cinema_se_met_au_travail.php [Accessed 04 April 2015].

²⁷ Flagship policy of the Jospin government (1997-2002), the 35-hour working week had the perverse effect of helping to “accélérer les cadences”, “intensifier le travail”, as stated by Marie Pezé in *J’ai très mal au travail* (Carré, 2007) in Chapter One. Last but not least, they were also used as a pretext for reorganising companies, as Cantet’s film demonstrates.

supposed to allow more free time to the employees, in many cases it has instead intensified their productivity as the reduction of working time has increased pressure alongside alienation.²⁸ *Ressources humaines* therefore underlines the changes that fundamentally transform the workplace as modernisation is presented as a non-ideological and inevitable necessity. Yet, Franck genuinely believes in his mission to modernise the workplace, which would bring changes for the good, before realising down the line what is really at stake and kept confidential: redundancies following a restructuring. The young trainee's first challenge is to win over his recalcitrant father, a conscientious although non-politicised welder who has worked in the factory for decades and also shares some characteristics with Mr Demarcy in *L'Etabli* (Linhart: 1978) explored in Section One of Chapter Four. Their opposite views are revealed through a very short but significant exchange of words:

Franck: C'est bien de ne pas toujours faire la même chose.

His father: Je ne sais pas...

Deep incompatibilities between two generations regarding the conception of work and the perception of the workplace keep emerging throughout the story. The son's education plays a determinant influence as there is now a clear distinction between Franck and his father in terms of class affiliation. The former does not belong anymore to the working class he came from. Charles Drazin observes: 'Caught between two classes, Franck tries in vain to reconcile the opposed attitude between management and labour. The drama plays itself out with the determinism of a morality tale, in which the characters are not so much individuals as allegorical types.'²⁹

By making possible social mobility, education has also driven apart both characters, and so does the chosen lexicon. For instance, the father doesn't grasp the meaning of the word 'annualisation' and of other expressions in the questionnaire put together by his well-meaning son. On the contrary, the welder is taken aback by an

²⁸ See Estevão, M & Sá, F. (2007) 'Les 35 heures en France: effet réel ou camisole de force?', *Telos* [online] 18 January. Available from: <http://www.telos-eu.com/fr/politique-economique/marche-du-travail/les-35-heures-en-france-effet-reel-ou-camisole-de-.html> [Accessed 20 December 2015]; Askenazy, P. (2004) *Les désordres du travail, Enquête sur le nouveau productivisme*, La RTT: leures et inégalités, op. cit., pp. 51-56.

²⁹ Drazin, C. (2011) *The Faber Book of French Cinema*, op. cit., p. 389.

alien terminology, ‘produits linguistiques de la classe dominante’.³⁰ The technocratic wording that is utilised in the questionnaires set by the young man is mainly the expression of a vertical linguistic domination in synch with that of a social one. Thus, when workers only have the possibility of expressing their views and grievances through the managerial language, the principle and the outcome are necessarily detrimental and control remains one-sided. Insofar as ‘le langage est porteur d’un héritage de significations’,³¹ they pay the price of losing their own social and historical heritage by mimicking the rulers’ system of values and communication that is enforced as the only alternative (see Section Two of Chapter One). Referring to a different socio-historical conflict, that of the French-speaking employees’ status in Canada, Claude Hagège writes: ‘Laisser les salariés s’exprimer dans leur langue est le meilleur moyen pour qu’ils affirment leur personnalité. La privation de la langue est au contraire facteur d’angoisse.’³² In the film, this sensitive matter is highlighted by the resistance of the union rep to any linguistic reappropriation by the management when the former retorts to the director: ‘N’utilisez pas des mots que vous ne connaissez pas!’ The ambivalent term to which she refers is ‘auto-gestion’. Last but not least, strategies of resistance are also hit with the eradication of working habits and of a class culture that had proved to be efficient and unifying through generations of workers (see Chapter One).

In Jean-Marc Moutout’s *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* released in 2004 (English title: *Work Hard, Play Hard*), we follow a young and promising consultant whose mission is to conduct an audit which is in reality the first step in cutting away the dead wood and troublemakers among staff prior to a major takeover.³³ Philippe (Jérémie Renier), the central character, is depicted as a decent and rather smart guy right from the outset.³⁴ Somehow, as the story develops, he will be torn between two irreconcilable attitudes in relation to his job as a consultant before progressively giving up his ethical compass by choosing to embrace the questionable values of his ruthless and control-freak line manager. Making as many employees redundant as possible has to be considered undeniable proof of

³⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1982) *Ce que parler veut dire: l’économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Editions Fayard), p. 53.

³¹ Le Goff, J-P. (2002) *La démocratie post-totalitaire*, op. cit., p. 71.

³² Hagège, C. (2012) *Défense du français* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob), p. 112.

³³ *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (2004) Directed by Jean-Marc Moutout [Film] op. cit.

³⁴ In the opening scene which takes place in the Parisian underground during rush hour, he is the only person who intervenes to defend a young woman who is being groped by a male passenger.

professionalism as well as an asset in furthering his career. Philippe's self-justification for going ahead with his mission is unambiguously expressed as follows: 'Si je me casse, un autre le fera. Et moi, j'aurais foutu ma carrière en l'air.' He thus surrenders his compassion and becomes a swine. As Richard Sennett states: 'Les consultants sont un ingrédient essentiel du pouvoir démocratique moderne, dont ils lubrifient la mécanique. [...] c'est à eux que revient le sale boulot consistant à réorganiser les activités à travers les périphéries de l'organisation [...]'.³⁵

In *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré*, cowardice and deceitfulness are institutionalized and considered core values of effective control for today's managerialism. In Philippe's case, 'ce divorce entre commandement et responsabilité explique toute la portée politique de ces pratiques.'³⁶ If one looks carefully at the leading characters, their divergences are as numerous as their similarities. On the one hand, Franck and Philippe both start their first job experience after graduating from a business education. On the other, what separates them is that they will follow opposite paths in terms of ethics. In many ways, they are representative of the dilemmas their generation faces: remaining honest and sticking to one's ethics in a society where dishonesty is considered a tacit asset, as someone is not systematically hired for their skills, work experience and qualifications but for their power of persuasion, manipulation and compliance, as we saw in the previous chapters and shall see in characters from other films in this chapter.

Another notable difference with Franck is that Philippe is fully aware of what his job consists of from the moment he sets foot in a company that needs to lay off part of its workforce. His assignment is to prepare for its selling off even though the takeover bid is kept confidential from staff until the last stages of the process. It is all about 'permettre le progrès permanent', as expressed by the indoctrinated young man. In this respect, Michela Marzano writes: 'La rhétorique managériale s'appuie sur la crise de sens qui envahit le monde contemporain. Elle reste bien sûr muette sur les causes de cette crise, mais surfe sur ses conséquences, notamment l'angoisse face à l'exclusion sociale.'³⁷ As underlined in Chapter One and in other films explored in this chapter, boards of directors and shareholders are well advised to convey the perception that

³⁵ Sennett, R. (2006) *La culture du nouveau capitalisme*, op. cit., p. 51.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁷ Marzano, M. (2008) *Extension du domaine de la manipulation, De l'entreprise à la vie privée*, op. cit., p. 159.

companies are in a permanent state of fragility in order to justify permanent sacrifices by employees whereby old solidarities are destroyed.

Franck embodies the return of the Prodigal Son. He is keen to progress in his career and is also eager to apply his theoretical knowledge whilst sticking to his decision to remain neutral/apolitical as the relations between the different parties (the management, HR, the union, and the staff) are overtly tense. The resistance and reticence expressed by the workers are something he does not quite fully comprehend. But soon his neutrality and zeal are put to the test when he discovers that he is just being used as a diversion by the CEO and the Director of HR who have a hidden agenda. By informing the union representative of his discovery, Franck turns into the equivalent of a whistleblower and chooses to fight along with the workers. His decision to challenge the management not only revives the need for political radicalism but also the possibility of a positive outcome. A socio-cultural transgression occurs in him. In his case, somehow, revealing his findings has the merit of creating a collective and united front strong enough to fight back. Thus, despite there being no insurrectional possibility in sight, radical action can at least go along with a renewed sense of optimism in terms of militancy and the return of collective social struggles may be reignited by a personified fragment: *le lanceur d'alerte*.³⁸

The values of solidarity that the young man shows as well as a genuine empathy for the workers were not taught in the business school he graduated from. Making the choice to embrace them puts him in total contradiction with his business background. At first sight, it is undeniable that he has jeopardised his promising career by his revelations and subsequently by standing by the workers. However, the sacrificial choice he made has empowered him, bridging the generational gap when his father decides to join the strike, having vanquished decades of docility and apoliticism. As Crozier and Friedberg state long before the film release:

Bref, à travers cette double phase de déstructuration/restructuration avec son cortège de conflits, d'antagonismes, d'intérêts divergents qui sont les conditions exceptionnelles et plus ouvertes de la crise et de la grève n'ont pu être étouffés, mais ont dû être assumés et dépassés, un apprentissage collectif a eu lieu, renforçant à terme les capacités d'action du groupe ouvrier dans son ensemble.³⁹

Having bettered themselves, the trainee and the blue-collar workers have united against the law of the market, reenacting a small-scale May 68 which was defined by the alliance between the working class and the students. Per contra, Philippe's

³⁸ The whistleblower (translated from French).

³⁹ Crozier, M. & Friedberg, E. (1977) *L'acteur et le système*, op. cit., p. 217.

professional success comes with a heavy price: the loss of integrity and moral compass. In the closing sequence, docile and politically vanquished by the ideology he has chosen to serve; he is left on a beach, bored and trapped in a loveless relationship. All things considered, the possible readings of the films are summed up by the asymmetrical trajectories of the two archetypal protagonists. Franck epitomises the inspirational hero driven by a self-taught social conscience whilst Philippe embodies the managerial villain who acts as a foil and represents a threat to the ordinary worker.

We shall now move on to other films wherein identical thematics are developed against the backdrop of globalisation.

In Philippe Le Guay's *Trois Huit* (English title: *Night Shift*) released in 2001, intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts are explored through the central thematic of bullying in the workplace (see Section Two of Chapter One).⁴⁰ The story highlights the difficulties encountered by Pierre, a bullied worker on the night shift of an automated bottle factory which is part of the Saint-Gobain multinational corporation. We meet a typical hard-working and happy couple with one child whose goal for the near future is to move into a new detached house that Pierre (Gérald Laroche) builds himself due to a tight budget. From a social perspective, contemporary France's portrait of a homogenous working class doesn't hold here. The fact that this ordinary family is about to start climbing the property ladder inevitably separates Pierre from his co-workers especially as his wife, who works in the hotel industry, is also given a promotion with added responsibilities.⁴¹ Interestingly, a role reversal also takes place here as she is bound to become the bread-winner, thus reassessing the classical model of the family, and perhaps challenging Pierre's masculinity, which can be interpreted as an element of potential stigmatisation when it comes to group dynamics defined by a macho culture amongst the male assembly line workers. By leaving the council estate for a private house, both characters reflect the changes in process within the social landscape as the political working class evolves into an apolitical, or less politicised, upwardly mobile lower-middle class with the achievement of ownership, one of the cornerstones of capital. Furthermore,

⁴⁰*Trois Huit* (2001) Directed by Philippe Le Guay [Film] op. cit.

⁴¹ She has climbed the career ladder from receptionist to manager and has acquired new skills such as English and IT by attending evening classes, which emancipates her even more from their working-class background.

living the comfortable life of assimilated *petit bourgeois* may take them away from the collective landmarks and identity which defined the class to which their parents belonged. On the other hand, expressions of old-style solidarity still live on. When worker Farid asks his colleagues to come and help Pierre complete some major work that has to be done on his house during their time off, they all unconditionally accept. After laying the concrete floor, they are all seated together sharing a mutual sense of achievement:

Franck (the foreman): C'est ça, la solidarité. Avant, les gens s'entraidaient. Ils se serraient les coudes. Ils se battaient contre le patron. Ils se battaient contre quelque chose.

One of the workers: Maintenant tu te bats pour pas perdre ton boulot. Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui, c'est chacun pour soi.

Fred: Tu parles. La solidarité, ça a jamais existé!

Despite their antagonistic views, which are heterogeneous expressions of a fragmented and disillusioned class, when they spontaneously all begin to sing *Salade de fruits*, it appears that for a brief moment the hopeful but ephemeral days of a communist culture and popular tradition, along with their aspirations, are back on track.⁴² Paradoxically, this scene just represents a nostalgic moment of revival of the collective project of a utopian society that never delivered while the conversation above sums up the deep changes that have occurred since the 1980s (see Chapter One).

Yet the initial success story does not go as planned, as taciturn Fred (Marc Barbé) will be using every trick in his power to control and destroy Pierre. Both characters personify two antagonistic archetypes of the working class: Fred, the defeated worker, and Pierre, the successful one. The former typifies the past that cannot let go whereas the latter embodies the present. In the film, a battle between the two conceptions takes place. The past wants to obliterate the present in order not to disappear and lose its prerogatives. Yet might they not be complementary and totally interconnected in socio-historical terms? From the outset, a reciprocal and equivocal fascination establishes itself between lonely macho Fred and frail but popular Pierre, who has everything the former is deprived of: a supportive wife, a promising and well-behaved son and soon his own house. Inversely Fred has features Pierre craves: expertise, virility and courage.

⁴² A popular song by Bourvil (1959).

All the same, Fred never misses an opportunity to impress his fellow-workers. The character might see himself as a working-class hero during the night shifts but his daytime life is another story as it is filled with loneliness and alcohol. ‘Je suis rien’, he sadly confesses to an exhausted Pierre. If train engineer Jacques Lantier (Jean Gabin) is portrayed as a troubled man in Jean Renoir’s *La Bête humaine*, he nonetheless remains an inspirational working-class role model with certain panache. He represents an archetypal projection that mirrors the political and social context of France in the late 1930s, shaped by the victory of the Popular Front and the preponderance of the Communist Party.⁴³ A lost sheep of his class, Fred lacks the social landmarks of recognition that are characteristic of the turn of the century. His wife left him for another man, which is, according to another team-worker, often the fate of those doing night shifts. On this matter, a worker jokingly reports what a fellow-worker commented: ‘... y a 50% de divorcés, 50% de cocus. Je sais parce que j’étais les deux, qui m’a dit!’

All through the film, the tormentor keeps on convincing the tormented that he is the one to be pitied and therefore always deserves forgiveness, at any cost: from crude jokes questioning Pierre’s sexual orientation, albeit the increasing humiliations at times being encouraged by the indifference of the others, to the final beating-up. There are no warnings or expressions of solidarity from fellow-workers with the exception of North African Farid who bluntly tells Pierre: ‘Si ça continue l’Arabe, ça va être toi.’ This therefore implies that workplace scapegoating is being displaced from the immigrant to the most vulnerable worker.

Progressively Fred’s perverse attitude that oscillates between kind deeds and overt cruelty puts Pierre’s sanity in jeopardy. These *injonctions paradoxales* have the power to turn the victims insane by triggering a narcissistic collapse.⁴⁴ Consciously or not, the tormentor wants to have a monopoly on Pierre’s undoing. The latter is indeed his scapegoat and no one else’s. Such a malevolent and reciprocal fascination reaches its climax in the scene in the communal changing room that represents the backstage of the workplace and perhaps class subconsciousness, where a hypnotised Pierre can’t help eyeing a rather languorous wet nude Fred who plays the former at his own game.

⁴³ *La Bête humaine* (1938) Directed by Jean Renoir [Film]. France: Lux Compagnie cinématographique de France (adapted from Emile Zola’s novel of the same name written in 1890).

⁴⁴ See Rousset, M. (2015) ‘Travail: peut-on résister aux injonctions paradoxales sans péter les plombs?’, *Télérama* [online] 04 May. Available from: <http://www.telerama.fr/idees/travail-peut-on-resister-aux-injonctions-paradoxales-sans-peter-un-boulon,126025.php> [Accessed 20 May 2015].

It shows in a both striking and furtive manner how disturbing the feelings at stake are, and the rather long close-up on Fred's face when he realises that he is being observed speaks for itself insofar as 'la caméra est l'être invisible qui crée l'être visible. Elle est non seulement le représentant du regard du réalisateur mais aussi un voyeur, comme le spectateur en quelque sorte.'⁴⁵ This leaves both of them terribly disturbed by an attraction-repulsion sense of virility – some would perceive it as a homoerotic subtext – that ties them together as well as isolating them from the others.

Throughout the story, the cold and constant noise of the assembly line fuels the increasing dramatic tension between the bully and the bullied. The film reaches its climax when the latter deliberately burns his hand by grasping an incandescent bottle from the assembly line whilst staring at the former; a desperate deed that aims to provoke and shock and can be construed in different ways. Has the tormented internalised his tormentor's behaviour to such an extent that the involvement of the latter is not required anymore? Is Pierre showing Fred that he is a real man by handling the pain of the burning despite the fact that he starts screaming and eventually faints? Sadomasochistic relationships work like addictions, and most addictions are lethal. In many cases, it takes much too long for any bullied person to come to the simple acknowledgement that they are clearly being tormented. In that respect, Pierre is no exception to the rule. Admitting that he is being subjected to bullying is considered a form of betrayal by his fellow-workers and foreman. He finds it extremely daunting having to challenge the collective, the night shift team he has just joined and into which he had hoped to fit. His recalcitrance is highlighted in a banal conversation with his mother:

The mother: Ca va à l'usine?

Pierre (evasive): Moyen...

The mother: T'as été voir le délégué syndical?

Pierre: C'est pas une question de revendication.

The mother: C'est quoi, alors?

Pierre: Y'a un type qui est tout le temps sur mon dos.

As revealed above, the protagonist sees no need to involve the union rep as he considers the issue to be an interpersonal one as well as out of the jurisdiction of the

⁴⁵ Roh, C-H. (2013) *Le film sur le film, une nouvelle approche analytique: son application à 2 films majeurs: "La nuit américaine" de François Truffaut et "Huit et demi" de Federico Fellini* (thèse de doctorat en Cinéma et audiovisuel) University of Paris 8.

organisation. Interestingly, such an attitude corroborates the way bullying is perceived by the victim, a problematic also touched on in Section Two of Chapter One. From the unions' viewpoint, the shared idea is that bullying has to remain a private matter. Such a counterproductive solidarity is echoed by the ambiguity of the parting words exchanged by the two protagonists in the final reel:

Fred: Merci de ne pas avoir porté plainte. T'as jamais rien dit.

Pierre: C'est normal. C'était entre nous.

With whom or what does responsibility lie? Responsibility has been externalised onto the shoulders of these two workers but it may lie elsewhere: the night shift, the factory, the community and society as a whole. As Hirigoyen puts it:

Aucune violence, dès lors qu'elle se situe dans notre société, n'est strictement individuelle. Simplement, sur le lieu du travail, la composante collective est plus importante, puisque les protagonistes sont dans un système et une hiérarchie, et qu'ainsi se met en place une double victimisation, par le harceleur d'abord, puis par les témoins et la hiérarchie qui n'interviennent pas.⁴⁶

The role played by the first night-time workers to arrive and the last day-time ones to leave is crucial as they represent the only link between both shifts. Their duty is to pass on the news regarding the mechanical breakdowns they had to deal with but also rumours and gossip from one team to the other, which will then reach the community at large. If the cleaner clearly witnesses Pierre being bullied, the whole community has therefore heard about his suffering, and nothing is done to stop it. It remains a 'private matter' after all. Last but not least, another parallel can be drawn between the small town's factory and the local school as conflicts, competitiveness, bonding, and bullying among the pupils in the playground mirror and mimic the parents' relationships and positions in the community organised around the factory. The school and the factory are inseparable. In the community, news travels fast and even Pierre's son is not spared by the other pupils' mockery and suffers in the playground for his father's humiliations. As Michel Foucault ponders: 'Quoi d'étonnant si la prison ressemble aux usines, aux écoles, aux casernes, aux hôpitaux, qui tous ressemblent aux prisons?'⁴⁷ The nature of the interpersonal conflict refers to a much bigger picture. At the crossroads of these institutions, the rules of the social game are set by determining the elusive balance of power in terms of the individual and class.

⁴⁶ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001), *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 265.

⁴⁷ Foucault, M. (1975) *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Editions Gallimard), p. 264.

If the film doesn't offer any solutions to tackle bullying in factories or in schools, its realism reflects the true sense of *cinéma du labeur*: sincerity by turning the director into a low-key and perhaps 'accidental whistleblower' with a film bearing a huge sense of moral responsibility stripped of any manipulative aesthetic markers, with an enhanced responsibility on his shoulders to compensate for the lack of opposition powers in today's place of work as explored in Chapter One.

In Sébastien Lifshitz's *Wild Side*,⁴⁸ globalisation and its socio-economic repercussions remain in the background and the three main characters' lives are implicitly explored in a class-centred narrative. What clearly emerges is the trio's attempt to find ways to put together their humanity in order to stand against the dehumanised new world order whilst regaining a minimum of control of their lives. Their constant efforts to survive oscillate between their humanity and objectified flesh and sexualisation.⁴⁹ The love triangle forms when Mikhail, using a very basic Globish as a tool of communication, meets Djamel.

Precariousness is the class orphans' landmark. For Stéphanie (Stéphanie Michelini) and Algerian hustler Djamel (Yasmine Belmadi), prostitution is a trivialised routine from which they don't want to escape as it is not better or worse than being exploited in an office, a shop or a factory. The 'sex workers' are just getting on with their occupations like any other secretary or sales assistant would, trapped in a dead-end job. At least, the absence of any pimp allows them to enjoy a relative autonomy, like any other under-the-table freelance work. As for illegal migrant Mikhail (Edouard Nikitine), a deserter from the Russian army, he earns his living by working as a kitchen porter and dishwasher in a restaurant. Stéphanie does night shifts; the secretaries and the sales assistants work during the day. They all have to earn their living. They just happen to be on the same public transport at the same time. Their faces carry a common silent submission observed in 'ces métros remplis de noyés', as Jacques Brel sings.⁵⁰ Also central to Le Guay's *Trois Huit* (see above), the constant rotation of day and night shifts shows that capitalism exists around the clock.

⁴⁸ *Wild Side* (2005) Directed by Sébastien Lifshitz [Film] op. cit.

⁴⁹ Stéphanie and Djamel meet by accident, introduced to each other by a young middle-class voyeur, a sort of globalised and Houellebecquian Cupid, who can only live out his fantasies of sodomy by proxy by paying others before disappearing when their sexual act is consummated.

⁵⁰ Brel, J. (1977) *Voir un ami pleurer*, Orly, Disques Barclay.

The storyline takes an unexpected turn when Stéphanie, accompanied by Mikhail and Jamel, decides to go back to her hometown after 16 years of absence in order to look after her dying mother. From that precise moment, the return of the repressed sets the tone of the film. Confronted by her childhood, the death of her father and sister and her former identity, Stéphanie sinks into her past through a mosaic of carefully delivered flashbacks which are triggered by the places that used to punctuate her everyday life in the days of her boyhood, when she was Pierre. What is revealed between the shots is a happy and proud working-class family living in industrially prosperous Picardy which contrasts with the present desolate landscapes. The odd trio's deep wounds gradually emerge through the solitude and intimacy of those impressionistic flashbacks. In deserted northern France, Mikhail is also overtaken by guilt regarding his past and the people he left behind in his remote Russia. Triggered by unforeseen circumstances, the returned of the repressed is also that of politics, bringing to the surface the political unconscious of a country in denial with its own socio-economic tragedies. It is also present in films such as *Le Temps du loup* (Haneke: 2002) and *La Graine et le mulet* (Kechiche: 2007). In the former, it is part of the chaos following the collapse of society whereas in the latter, it emerges with the sudden redundancy of the protagonist. This brings us to also consider *cinéma du labeur* to be a *cinéma du retour du refoulé*; a backlash against a repressive social reality that was momentarily ignored and bottled up by *cinéma du look* in the 1980s. As Julie Esparbes observes:

Ce cinéma, à l'opposé du cinéma d'évasion, même s'il utilise des ressorts fictionnels, vise à toucher l'imaginaire politique avec une description sans complaisance de la société et de ses problèmes. Plus que simplement montrer des populations et des situations sociales jusque-là peu représentées au cinéma, il fait de ces éléments des objets centraux des films, servant une critique sociale marquée. Les cinéastes se constituent par là même comme des *témoins* de la réalité sociale française et de ses dysfonctionnements.⁵¹

In *Wild Side*, the different settings through which the characters wander represent geographic extremes: a summary of globalisation. On the one hand, there is the shady and seedy population one can encounter on Parisian nightlife pavements, from the electrified nightclubs to the busy railway stations, that is to say places which could be found replicated in any big cities worldwide to facilitate mass entertainment and mass consumption. On the other, there is the void of northern France's dead and buried

⁵¹ Esparbes, J. (2005) 'L'engagement dans le cinéma français contemporain', Université Lyon 2 [online] http://doc.sciencespo-lyon.fr/Ressources/Documents/Etudiants/Memoires/Cyberdocs/MFE2005/esparbes_j/pdf/esparbes_j.pdf [Accessed 02 September 2017], p. 64.

industries, with its wrecked factories, ghostly villages, immense and dull abandoned fields, which are emptied of politics but remain haunted by the lost social struggles that took place. Those same places are visited all over again and not only do they have the power to disembody the characters but also to deprive them of any possible sense of belonging, identity, gender and future. Their bodies and memories remain trapped in a repetitive wandering. They are members of an underclass caged by exclusion, nearing what Gilles Deleuze describes when he defines an action-image:

The rise of situations to which one can no longer react, of environments with which there are now only chance relations, of empty or disconnected any-space-whatevers replacing qualified extended space. [...] These are pure optical and sound situations, in which the character does not know how to respond, abandoned spaces in which he ceases to experience and to act so that he enters into a flight, goes on a trip, comes and goes, vaguely indifferent to what happens to him, undecided as to what must be done.⁵²

Yet, depoliticised and marginalised, the trio can only bear the brunt by trying their best to survive with minimum dignity. The different structures of incessant and directionless movement used in the film are brought to a halt following the mother's serious illness. The protagonists challenge the spatial and moral emptiness by sticking together and managing to share an unseen tenderness as the only antidote, perhaps something that would not have been possible in Paris. This could be a dystopian version of a Truffautian modern love triangle inspired by *Jules et Jim*,⁵³ a landmark of the French New Wave cinema and, with their Beineixian traits, the remnants of a forgotten film *du look*. Such cinematographic tropes both encapsulate the carefree era that characterises *les Trente Glorieuses* (1945-1975) and the subsequent *Vingt Piteuses* (1975-1995) dominated by cynicism and apoliticism.

The film's singularity is at its most evocative when the fragment unveils the whole. A scene in which foreign transsexuals are taught to play pétanque by working-class locals in a suburban Parisian estate suggests that the emergence of new forms of cooperation is possible as the odd 'micro-commune' that the three main characters form sets the tone. As O'Shaughnessy states:

Fragments of the working class can be found but have been evicted from their old spaces and separated from their enemy. The spaces can still be gone into but are no longer inhabited by a group with a self-conscious socio-political identity. The enemy can be tracked but no longer face to face. The language of resistance may still be heard, but is no longer carried by an epic choir.⁵⁴

⁵² Deleuze, G. (1989) *Cinéma 2, The Time-Image* (London: Athlone), p. 272.

⁵³ *Jules et Jim* (1962) Directed by François Truffaut [Film]. France: Les Films du Carrosse/SEDIF.

⁵⁴ O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 57.

If the excluded cannot beat the system, are totally alienated from society, they retain a sense of caring for, and residual solidarity with, each other.

Compassion and solidarity are also vivid thematic in Eric Guirado's *Le Fils de l'épicier* (English title: *The Grocer's Son*).⁵⁵ The film delivers what bitter sweet comedies are meant to deliver insofar as successive setbacks are resolved in a happy ending that consists of the reconciliation of a family despite an intergenerational crisis triggered by work-related issues. In this social parable, the subtlety with which Antoine's reluctance to embrace his Provençal roots is addressed, along with the unquantifiable but vital relationship that he develops with the old locals, avoids the trap of establishing a reactionary narrative, or justifying the market economy. Thus, Antoine (Nicolas Casalé) and Claire (Clotilde Hesme) are representative of their generation. They struggle to make ends meet, are subjected to precarious jobs and find it hard to access adulthood and the financial autonomy that comes with it. Both also share some features with characters of a neo-film *du look* yet with 'no look' insofar as the artifices and photogenic embellishment of the genre have worn off and economic realities (chronic instability and school dropout respectively) have caught up with them. The 30-something man is defined neither with particular skills nor formal qualifications. He is a drifter, living in a flat scattered with unopened boxes and working as a waiter in Lyon.⁵⁶

Whether he has what it takes for trade or not, he decides half-heartedly to go and help his mother with the family grocery situated in a small village in Provence.⁵⁷ Whilst the father recovers from a heart attack, the mother looks after the shop and Antoine drives the van around and sells his goods to the dispersed community composed of old farmers and retired people. However, the temporary changeover turns out to be more challenging than expected. Lacking the basic skills that would enable him to tackle the reality *du labeur*, the young man is unprepared for the relationships that his father had established with each of his regular customers over

⁵⁵ *Le Fils de l'épicier* (2007) Directed by Eric Guirado [Film] op. cit.

⁵⁶ After visiting his estranged father (Daniel Duval), who has had a heart attack, in hospital, he arrives late at work for the second time in a week and gets a reprimand from his manager in the presence of the other members of staff. He just cannot cope with the humiliation and quits his job right away. Desperate for work and in a last attempt to fall back on his feet, he asks a local grocer he has befriended to consider forming a partnership in order to run his father's shop. His proposal is met with scepticism by the grocer who suggests: 'Essaie de garder un boulot trois mois, on en reparle après. De toute façon, toi, tu n'es pas fait pour le commerce.'

⁵⁷ Dreading returning to his roots, Antoine asks 26-year-old drifter Claire (Clotilde Hesme), who is studying for her baccalauréat as a distance-learning student and needs a change of scenery, to come with him.

the passing years. The latter are all elderly and of modest origins. They won't change their consumption habits. They take their time and are not the spending kind. Antoine is flabbergasted by some of their requests.⁵⁸

The locals in return are quite unsettled by Antoine's dry and detached manners as he is definitely not as obliging as his predecessor used to be. They resist him and vice versa. Being friendly and forthcoming is not his way; he just doesn't see the point of adding a human touch to the way he operates. After all, he is just covering for his incapacitated father as he happens to be jobless. He considers himself a temporary salesman whereas the role that was set by the former was more of a substitute social worker from the viewpoint of the members of the community, highlighting the deficiency of social services which affects the isolated elderly following the desertification of rural areas in France.⁵⁹ Claire's *du look* idea to repaint the van in multi-colours in order to attract attention and boost sales pays off. Driving a psychedelic vehicle has a positive impact on Antoine's mood and cooperativeness, especially as it functions as a metonymy for their reciprocal attraction. Thus, he becomes progressively helpful, non-judgmental and obliging. His regular visits to Mr Clément's isolated farm make him realise that the old lonely man shows some early signs of Alzheimer's disease. He decides to help him on the farm by rebuilding the wrecked hen house. Confronted with social adversity, Antoine is forced to redefine himself and therefore to find who he truly is insofar as 'all narrative enacts a passage from Nature to Culture'.⁶⁰

When the season is over, his father announces that he is retiring for good. The young man's first thoughts are for the old people who will be left without support. The little extras his activity provides to the rural community go well beyond the sale of goods. Antoine's job is valuable thanks to the essential deeds he humbly performs, not because of its nature. The concept customer/salesman is transcended and the common values are exquisitely shared around, which allows the community to last and survive. This used to give a sense of purpose to the retired grocer and now to his

⁵⁸ When an old granny asks him if he could stop by a local chapel to say a little prayer on her behalf for her grand-daughter who is in trouble, he ends up charging her five euros for it, to her great astonishment.

⁵⁹ See Chasles, V., Denoyel, A. & Vincent, C. (2013) 'La démographie médicale en France, le risque des déserts médicaux. L'exemple de la Montagne ardéchoise.', *Géococonfluences* [online] 26 March. Available from: <http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/doc/transv/sante/SanteDoc4.html> [Accessed 10 December 2015].

⁶⁰ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 262.

son who is ready to take on the baton. Eventually, the odd crowd conquers the son's heart. Interestingly, both young adults start off as uncertain characters *du look* yet are transfigured to accomplished characters *du labeur*, finally caught up by the social tensions intrinsic to their political unconscious (whose direct expression could be identified as a process of gradual responsabilisation) that transforms the enduring but fragile community they have reluctantly joined in the first place and that they socially and economically embrace and sustain. This coming-of-age film has therefore come full circle. In this particular instance, this has shown that *cinéma du labeur* was also meant to colonise that of *du look* and to finally reach the status of a *cinéma de la démondialisation* in order to act as a valid counterpoint to neo-liberal hegemony.

To close this section, control and resistance within intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts in characterisation are also the core thematics of Abdellatif Kechiche's *La Graine et le mulet* (English title: *Couscous*).⁶¹ Bringing fresh mullet to his ex-wife Souad, his daughter and grand-daughter, is a good pretext for taciturn Slimane Beji (played by Habib Boufares) to keep in touch with them as well as trying to make amends as it's been more two months since he last paid alimony. The traditional dish prepared by the mother every Sunday gives the family the opportunity to meet. (Named by her 'le couscous de l'amour', it echoes the sumptuous meal concocted by Parisian refugee Babette, revisited in a 21st-century southern France working-class estate.)⁶² Despite the everyday difficulties faced by the family, the established gathering as a means of social buffering allows them to offload their preoccupations in a convivial atmosphere. Abundance, generosity and mirth strengthen the links that keep the family bonds alive. Kechiche describes the mullet as follows: 'It's a fish with true character; it's hard to catch and has extraordinary energy. It's the only fish that has the capacity to jump over the nets. It's a very strong symbol for me. I consider that it's almost a part of the popular classes, and at the same time it carries that capacity of revolt.'⁶³ The spine of the film, the metonymic food has a transformative impact on the characters' lives as the story unfolds. Not only do the characters all revolve around the dish but the social fabric of Sète will be redefined because of it whilst the archetypal protagonist's fate will be sealed by it. The idea that

⁶¹ *La Graine et le mulet* (2007) Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche [Film] op. cit.

⁶² *Le Festin de Babette* (1987) Directed by Gabriel Axel [Film]. Denmark: Nordisk Film.

⁶³ Drazin, C. (2011) *The Faber Book of French Cinema*, op. cit., p. 391.

the Republic is deeply indisposed to fully embracing diversity is also a possible interpretation.

Yet, globalisation bites. The 60-year-old Tunisian craftsman has lived and worked there for most of his life, fixing and renovating boats in a shipyard when he is told by his boss that he will lose his full-time job as the small company is going through financial difficulties due to increased competition. Following the reorganisation, he has to accept a more flexible timetable with reduced hours, thus finding it difficult to adapt to both lean production and a more intensive pace. As explored in the previous chapters, the amount of time for which each worker performs their tasks taps into the psyche of the subconscious from which the edification of their self can either thrive or not. Thus, the intensification of productivity mirrors the deterioration of Slimane's expertise, which is unbearable for him insofar as the pace dictated by tight deadlines is not compatible with his love of craft.⁶⁴ Ivan du Roy identifies the phenomenon as a 'tragique paradoxe: les plus investis dans leur travail sont très souvent les plus touchés.'⁶⁵ His self-esteem in jeopardy, deeply humiliated and puzzled by this culture of enterprise he cannot condone, or even grasp, Slimane decides to quit. Precariousness hits him even harder, given that his employer had never declared his income. To his great astonishment, he discovers that he worked illegally for a substantial number of years. His precarious situation echoes that of newly retired worker Serge (Gérard Depardieu) in Gustave Kervern and Benoît Delépine's epic road movie *Mammuth*, who has to travel on an old motorbike across the country in order to get in touch with former employers (and therefore through his repressed past) without whom he cannot claim his full pension.⁶⁶

Slimane bears all the stigmas attached to many immigrant workers. Following his resignation, religion and identity resurface through his attempt to set up his dream business. Instead of listening to his elder son who wants him to go back to Tunisia to live a would-be happy life with the redundancy money he finally gets, the pensioner

⁶⁴ Conscientiousness and meticulousness are qualities Slimane is proud of and he won't make any compromise. From his point of view, two days are not enough to repair a boat. Yet not meeting the deadlines is not an option and he is told off by his manager who makes it clear that the ageing man has become a liability.

⁶⁵ Du Roy, I. (2009) *Orange stressé*, op. cit., p. 211.

⁶⁶ *Mammuth* (2010) Directed by Gustave Kervern & Benoît Delépine [Film]. France: Ad Vitam Distribution.

devises other plans. With support from stepdaughter Rym,⁶⁷ whom he drives around with his moped (a vehicle associated with working-class imagery), he decides to acquire an old and abandoned barge that he intends to turn into a floating restaurant that would also be used as a Muslim community centre during the Ramadan fasting. Analogous to *L'Atalante* by Jean Vigo (1934), the barge is the centrepiece of the film, a dream for social integration and a place of work for him and his blended family.

However his conversion to entrepreneur is beset by handicaps. He is old, Tunisian, has little capital and no connections. The administrative procedures are complicated, absurd and unfair. As O'Shaughnessy states: 'The migrant is a key figure of our times. Coming from outside our frame of reference, for reasons that are felt to be obscure, he or she is an incarnation of the opacity of the new world and of our uncertainty about how we should deal with it.'⁶⁸ As all the legal procedures both characters undertake come to nothing, the whole country's mentality emerges through the way the microcosmic town's administration deals with the project. Mooring the old tub on the much sort-after *Quai de la République* seems doomed from the start. If health and safety issues are a deterrent, Rym's argument of creating a place for the Muslim community is legitimate but hardly convincing, considering the administrative heaviness and polite reluctance of the town bureaucrats. The *Quai de la République* is also part of the political game that is just the tip of the iceberg, which suggests the existence of much deeper local political score-settling.⁶⁹ Inviting the big shots and dignitaries to raise money is the only option left. As determined and pragmatic daughter Karima sums it up: 'Ca va marcher, du moment que ce n'est pas une mosquée.' The couscous is cooked by Souad, in her kitchen. It comes straight from her humble council flat to treat the town elites. But prejudices are quickly resurfacing from the short-lived pretence of the guests who play a double game. They are the white establishment and there is a strong sense that they have no interest in letting Slimane succeed. Commenting on his film, Abdellatif Kechiche is keen to

⁶⁷ The young woman (Hafzia Hersi) also plays a key role in the film; as does her mother who owns the run-down hotel where Slimane (with whom she regularly shares her bed) and other retired musicians live and share their nostalgia of Maghreb through music sessions.

⁶⁸ O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 143.

⁶⁹ Slimane seems unaware that the symbolic but inconvenient barge can only remain moored there for a few days and will have to be continuously moved to different spots. And to cap it all, the rock-bottom prices of his dishes will be a threat to the nearby restaurants owned by the white locals.

point out that, 'This is an ordinary French family. Given this, I didn't feel there was anything exotic to show.'

If exoticism is a by-product of colonisation, revisionism and advertising, it lies first and foremost in the eyes of the beholder. It also thrives in cinematic genres, e.g. the 'heritage film' and *cinéma du look*. In other words, its representations are stereotyped, distorted, and deceitful and most of all ideological, which is the exact opposite of the film in which it is truly demystified. On the other hand, at the risk of contradicting the film director, when the grain goes missing at the moment it should be being served,⁷⁰ exoticism and eroticism are used as a last resort when Rym's belly dance becomes a powerful means of diversion to save the day. Such a wise strategy has the merit of distracting the guests from their resentment and hunger as the captivated males succumb to their own representation of female languor whilst making the white females jealous and envious. Resilience, unity and charm pay off in the end even if by means of pandering to exoticist misogyny. Akin to the reminiscence of a long time gone and supposedly glorious colonialism, her trance, combined with the music, is communicative in the same way that the couscous should be. Her dance lasts as long as it takes for her mother to cook the grain. Moreover, a parallel action takes place between Rym's salutary and lengthy dance and Slimane's race to find the missing grain. The juxtaposed scenes are united by the same score played on the barge with increasing rhythm and at maximum volume. (To and fro, music is thus non-diegetic [*musique de fosse*] when the old running man is filmed and diegetic [*musique d'écran*] back on the barge.)⁷¹ Both characters struggle like madmen to save their workplace. The young girl's otherness and exoticisation represent the last hope for a successful social integration for the archetypal family.

Yet tragedy strikes as Slimane's desperate attempt to find Majid fails whilst Rym will complete her dance unscathed. The old man keeps running in vain after his moped is stolen by three kids who keep teasing him on the estate's empty streets that are akin to a maze. As Charles Drazin observes: 'The uncomfortable dance of certainty takes on a touch of Scheherazade: it goes on to put off the fact that there will be no ending for Slimane, who is left to battle forlornly against the haphazard cruelty

⁷⁰ The team has to think of a swift solution whilst Slimane leaves on his moped in a desperate attempt to trace promiscuous Majid as the couscous has been left in his car boot. Souad is nowhere to be found as she tries to find a homeless person who lives in her area in order to give him 'l'assiette du pauvre', as is the tradition.

⁷¹ A distinction made by Michel Chion (*musique de fosse*: pit music/*musique d'écran*: accompanying music) in Powrie, P. & Reader, K. (2002) *French Cinema, A Student's Guide* (London: Arnold), p. 83.

of the world. [...].⁷² The closing scene suggests that the protagonist won't survive his endless pursuit around the council estate at the same time as his project comes to life and succeeds in the city-centre. In a shot taken from faraway, the old immigrant never gets the gratitude he truly deserves. Alone in a dark corner of a block of flats where he lived most of his life, he collapses and passes away like an incomplete citizen. Yet, his sacrifice is not useless as his legacy has been passed to his own family and community, which proves him right. A success story emerges from the combined actions of two generations of female members from two Tunisian families. The collective wins over the individual.

Despite its ambivalent ending, *La Graine et le mulet* remains a hopeful social drama in which class recognition, integration and social mobility play a central part. The North African dish symbolises a sense of belonging and unquantifiable wealth in a society deprived of both. In that respect, reflecting on what should be the main factors that define historical periods, historian Fernand Braudel rightly underlines that food habits, among other crucial elements, are ignored: '[...] que mangent-ils? Que boivent-ils? Comment s'habillent-ils? Questions incongrues, qui exigent presque un voyage de découverte, car, vous le savez, l'homme ne mange, ni ne boit, dans les livres d'histoire traditionnelle.'⁷³ One of the favourite dishes of the French people,⁷⁴ it is thus a reminder of precisely what our contemporary period lacks: a hint of a speculative 6th Republic, in which secularism and integration will have succeeded: *liberté, égalité, fraternité, laïcité* and... *couscous*.

In this section we have explored six films in which intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts are tackled from the perspective of globalisation that shapes in different ways the trajectories of characters' lives, social statuses and places of work. We will now examine five nihilist motion pictures where the place of work crystallises conflict inherent to class. In these films, overt forms of violence result from the absence of a unifying ideology and intermediary bodies (e.g. the state and the unions). Raw competition and endemic reification in terms of balance of power, class distribution and inequalities are the main themes.⁷⁵ One should consider such a conversion from symbolic to physical violence to be a last resort for re-establishing

⁷² Drazin, C. (2011) *The Faber Book of French Cinema*, op. cit., p. 392.

⁷³ Braudel, F. (1985) *La dynamique du capitalisme* (Paris: Editions Flammarion), p. 17.

⁷⁴ See *Le Figaro & Agence France Presse* (2011) 'Le magret, plat préféré des Français', *Le Figaro* [online] 21 October. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/10/21/97001-20111021FILWWW00601-le-magret-plat-prefere-des-francais.php> [Accessed 05 June 2015].

⁷⁵ See Bourdieu, P. & Passeron J-C. (1970) *La Reproduction* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit).

a sense of social readjustment, desperate control and poetic justice against the backdrop of neo-liberal globalisation.

2. Survival of the fittest: Places of work and the law of the gun/market

Ainsi, avant même d'être pleinement entrée dans les faits, la logique de compétition généralisée pénètre les esprits, diffuse la peur et une culture de marché, une culture de guerriers qui rend obsolète la culture de tous ceux qui se croyaient encore membres d'une société humaine. (Généreux, J. (2011) *La dissociété*, p. 130).

In the opening scene of Jean-Marc Moutout's *De bon matin*,⁷⁶ executive Paul Wertret (Jean-Pierre Darroussin) who has worked in the banking sector for three decades gets ready for work and guns down in cold blood two younger executives as soon as he arrives. Sitting at his desk, he waits calmly for the arrival of the police before taking his own life. The introspective flashbacks that follow reveal the journey of a success story that ends abruptly when the protagonist is demoted to a position with fewer responsibilities by his boss following a restructuring that is dictated by the mechanics of financial markets.⁷⁷ Yet beyond the tragedy of this trivial event, the logic is that of an ideological smokescreen in which any sense of responsibility is conveniently overlooked by anyone: the reification of all the characters whose professional fate is sealed in the wake of the sub-prime mortgage crisis.⁷⁸ As explored in the subsequent films, the use of a gun disturbingly symbolises the ultimate attempt at a desperate social reappropriation of control when all other alternatives have failed and the ambivalent and destructive forces of the market have prevailed.

Cinéma du labeur can easily morph into *cinéma du chômage de masse*. A *film noir* par excellence, Costa-Gavras' *Le Couperet* released in 2004 is based on the recorded confessions of serial murderer Bruno Davert (José Garcia), a brilliant executive working in the paper-making industry.⁷⁹ The protagonist's promising career as a project manager ends following a relocation which costs him his position, along with hundreds of others. After three years with no job in sight and out of desperation, he selects the five people that could represent a threat if a job opportunity arises and

⁷⁶ *De bon matin* (2011) Directed by Jean-Marc Moutout [Film]. France: Les Films du Losange.

⁷⁷ It is true that Paul's sick leave following a period of depression and alcoholism also plays a part in his demotion insofar as it manifests an unforgivable sign of inner weakness that is not compatible with the imperativeness of ultra performance.

⁷⁸ The triggering element of the financial crisis of 2007-2008.

⁷⁹ *Le Couperet* (2004) Directed by Costa-Gavras [Film]. France: Studio Canal. The film is a loose adaptation of *The Ax* (1997), a novel written by Donald E. Westlake.

decides to physically eliminate them. These calculated killings include Raymond Machefer (Olivier Gourmet), a successful executive who is the face of Arcadia Papers.⁸⁰ If 'being on top is only possible when others are on the bottom',⁸¹ the narrator's inner thoughts are revealed through his voiceover:

Si je tuais mille actionnaires, ça ne me rapporterait rien. Si je tuais dix PDG ayant renvoyé mille employés chacun, qu'est-ce que j'en tirerais? Rien. Ce sont eux mes ennemis, mais ils ne sont pas mon problème. Ces cinq CV étaient mon problème. Ces cinq-là... seulement cinq... plus Machefer.

If a sense of jubilation mixed with unbearable guilt follows his first clumsy murder, the transgression that has occurred allows him to leap from a long-term unemployed nobody to a sort of demiurge. Individualistic salvation is the only way out and class struggle is thus replaced by that of competing individuals belonging to the same protean category and craving control.⁸² In *La société du risque*, Ulrich Beck perfectly encapsulates the solitude of the individual who has to deal with unemployment and its socio-economic consequences as a personal failure. He observes:

Dans le contexte de l'individualisation, le chômage de masse est vécu comme un destin personnel. Les gens ne sont plus touchés par le chômage de façon collective et socialement visible, ils en sont victimes dans certaines phases spécifiques de l'existence. [...] Dans ces existences individualisées et privées de leurs référents de classe, le destin collectif se transforme d'emblée en destin personnel, en destin individuel qui s'inscrit dans une société que l'on n'aborde plus que de façon statistique.⁸³

A tragic substitute for long-gone solidarities, the gun is the ultimate chance for Davert to fall back on his feet as taking lives is paramount for securing narcissistic reconstruction as well as social reappropriation. He is a mere expression of an all-out 'darwinisation' of the economic system that has been taking place and is being intensified by globalisation. This is somehow an ideological as well as convenient recuperation by the representatives of neo-liberalism. A distorted transfer from Darwin's biological theories regarding species' natural selection to the economic sphere, which makes it look even more inevitable as scientifically proven; a

⁸⁰ Originating from Ancient Greek, Arcadia represents a utopian and pastoral province where inhabitants are sophisticated, peaceful and uncorrupted. There is some analogy between such an unreachable place and Machefer's coveted position in the film.

⁸¹ O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 95.

⁸² See de Gaulejac, V., Blondel, F. & Taboada-Leonetti, I. (1995) *La lutte des places* (Paris: Editions de L'Epi).

⁸³ Beck, U. (2001) *La société du risque. Sur la voie d'une autre modernité* (Paris: Editions Aubier), p. 195.

misconception as ‘[...] Darwin reconnaissait que la solidarité et la coopération jouaient aussi un rôle dans l’évolution des espèces.’⁸⁴ Hyper-individualism has therefore become pathology. Given that Davert is an unemployed serial killer, his son is a thief and his wife is having an affair; the disintegration of the ideal middle-class family is absolute in the wake of the protagonist’s long redundancy period.⁸⁵ Thus, the confession of Marlène’s unfaithfulness is entirely sidelined by what really matters, that is the predominant status of work. In this respect, his sudden burst of anger lamenting the disappearance of old solidarities is particularly telling:

Mais en me volant mon travail on m’a pris ma vie! ma vie! Et au risque de gâcher celle de toute ma famille. Alors, d’accord le travail n’est pas tout. Mais sans travail, je suis quoi, hein? Et je fais comment? Avant, avec les collègues, on était comme une tribu, travaillant ensemble, comptant les uns sur les autres. Et une fois licenciés, c’est fini la tribu. On est devenus des ennemis, pire, des concurrents. Chacun pour soi et pas de Dieu pour tous. [...] Ça signifie que je dois battre la concurrence et que pour ça, je ne peux compter sur personne à part moi.

In the case of *Le Couperet*, the frequent close-ups on advertisements that punctuate the story, either broadcast on TV or displayed on street and bus posters, with their slogans and imagery, hint at a consumer society incompatible with unemployment and precarity whilst in the protagonist’s car, the radio keeps giving the latest figures from the Paris Stock Exchange. Thus the market penetrates every aspect of society ‘comme un liquide [...] qui ne laisse rien, qui n’épargne rien. C’est pourquoi on peut parler aujourd’hui de régime globalitaire parce qu’il y a une sorte de volonté à imposer une solution unique à la pluralité des problèmes.’⁸⁶ The plot development and the epilogue deliver a crude observation of a society obsessed with individualism and unabashed careerism. James Travers reflects with a pinch of irony on Davert’s violence and the kind of society in which this violence takes place. He writes:

You want him to succeed so that he can win back his self-esteem and save his family – even if this means literally butchering his rivals. What does this say about the kind of world we now live in, where in order to survive, we must literally exterminate the opposition? What will you do – when the axe falls? A spot of D.I.Y. head-hunting, perhaps?⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Généreux, J. (2011) *La dissociété*, op. cit., p. 250.

⁸⁵ Yielding to the pressure of his wife, he agrees to go and see a marriage guidance councillor as their relationship is on the rocks.

⁸⁶ Ignacio Ramonet interviewed in *L’encerclement. La démocratie dans les rets du néolibéralisme* (2009) Directed by Richard Brouillette [Documentary film] op. cit.

⁸⁷ Travers, J. (2008) ‘Le Couperet’ (Synopsis & Film Review). *Films de France* [online]. Available from: <http://www.filmsdefrance.com/review/le-couperet-2005.html> [Accessed 01 February 2017].

Thus, the protagonist remains a projection of all the unpolitically correct and unavowed thoughts and frustrations that one might experience in the same situation without taking action. Insofar as the bullets used to eliminate his competitors are primarily fictional, his deeds become a cathartic outlet for the viewers. Machefer eliminated, Davert ends up getting the job and his dream of becoming the new face of Arcadia Papers comes true. Yet in the final reel, a mysterious *femme fatale* entirely compliant with Hollywoodian criteria prints out his photograph before making eye contact with him in an affluent cocktail bar, which strongly suggests that she's the next serial killer who will topple him, therefore perpetrating an endless cycle of lethal competition in a society responsible for producing corporate monsters.

In Benoît Delépine and Gustave Kervern's eponymous *Louise-Michel* released in 2008 there is no room for negotiation.⁸⁸ The exploited show an excessive but therapeutic radicalism for avenging the casualties inflicted by global market interdependence in order to get justice. The genre morphs into a film that outlines an effective satire of globalisation and its consequences for the vulnerable whilst 'putting a spin on British social realist films', e.g. *The Full Monty*.⁸⁹ The caricaturisation of the members of the working class as well as that of the bosses and the hired killers provides the story with a strong sense of burlesque. The bosses are manipulative wimps devoid of any morality and the pseudo-hitmen are lousy and inexperienced. The Zola-esque workers are scruffy, unsophisticated, plain, and even illiterate in the case of ex-con Jean-Pierre (played by Yolande Moreau) who has become Louise and Cathy (Bouli Lanners) who is now Michel, in order to avoid discrimination in the jobs market. 'Négation des identités comme stade ultime de l'aliénation moderne',⁹⁰ Louise and Michel's gender role reversal as an attempt to escape class exploitation, stigmatisation and all-out competition falls short insofar as it is still no protection against being made redundant and marginalised.

All the above elements are combined in a recipe for disaster with vaudevillian entertainment guaranteed. The opening scene is unequivocal: a close-up on a portrait of an old ordinary worker moves down in slow motion toward a coffin that is about to be cremated in the presence of a taciturn family whilst a clumsy undertaker starts to

⁸⁸ *Louise-Michel* (2008) Directed by Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern [Film] op. cit. The film was awarded the *Prix Jacques Prévert du Scénario* for Best Original Screenplay in 2009.

⁸⁹ Bradshaw, P. (2011) 'Louise-Michel', *The Guardian* [online review] 31 March. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/mar/31/louise-michel-review> [Accessed 01 February 2017].

⁹⁰ Ferenczi, A. (2008) 'Louise-Michel', *Télérama* [online review] 24 December. Available from: <http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/films/louise-michel.359692.php> [Accessed 01 February 2017].

play the well-known left-wing anthem *L'Internationale*. The use of the diegetic score thus validates the defeat of the working class by symbolically staging its own burial: no corpse to bury, just ashes to scatter. In the subsequent scene, a group of subservient female machinists assembled in a single frame listen in silence to the pontificating discourse of their manager off camera who praises their dedication and sense of abnegation. A few months later, the same team of workers, about to start their daily shift, discover that their clothing workshop has been emptied as every machine has disappeared overnight due to an unexpected relocation. This economic trend is underpinned by Rémi Fournier Lanzoni who writes: 'While purchasing power was no longer rising as it had done in the 1990s, the intensification of globalization was beginning to have an impact on the economy, resulting not only in more opportunity for companies but also in a dangerous trend for outsourcing abroad.'⁹¹

There is no one to blame or take a stand against as the boss has vanished. Whilst processing the trauma of being made redundant with little financial compensation, the workers decide, with the agreement of the union representative, to put their money together and unanimously opt for the radical proposal of pseudo-transgender Louise, which is to hire a pseudo-transgender hitman named Michel to find and assassinate the fleeing boss. The film develops into a Keaton-esque road movie wherein each killed boss ends up being the wrong target. The protagonists play cat and mouse with transnational capital from Picardy to Brussels, and finally to Jersey, a well-known tax haven. Following a sequence of Russian Doll killings one discovers that the true target lives in Florida, where the group of workers decide to go in order to do the job themselves, thus establishing a clear sense of class control and reappropriation.

Somehow, the birth of Louise and Michel's baby closes the film with a glimpse of hope, which restores the possibility of a rebirth for the working class by counterbalancing the latter's symbolic funeral in the opening sequence. Ultimately, the reference to Louise Michel, a salient and unifying figure in French anarchism from the 19th century, is clearly established after the end credits of this refreshing and irreverent film *du labeur*.

Global issues in film also find a vehicle in dystopian narratives, the scope of which is primarily to magnify and sharpen our sense of cracked contemporaneity and total loss of control. Michael Haneke therefore transcends the genre to the next phase,

⁹¹ Fournier Lanzoni, R. (2015) *French Cinema, 2nd Edition* (London: Bloomsbury), p. 426.

a *cinéma de la fin du labeur* defined by a complete redistribution of the class system and of the economy in an apocalyptic context. Released in 2002, *Le Temps du loup* (English title: *Time of the Wolf*), a disaster movie, is based on a hypothesis and explores the outcome following the swift collapse of French society, which leads to the pulverisation of the social classes.⁹² Interestingly enough, the sudden disappearance of the latter reminds us of their existence. The middle-class, city-dwelling Laurent family, fleeing in their car loaded with supplies, cannot do anything when they discover that their country home is being occupied by a poorer foreign family who simply refuses to leave by challenging the obsolete concept of private property. The confrontation between the two results in tragedy. After her husband is shot dead, main character Anne (Isabelle Huppert) and her two children just walk away in the dark with a lighter, a bicycle and a few derisory pieces of jewellery. The market has dismally failed. The disappearance of money and cities has brought down a certain conception of global capitalism with it. As Antonio Gramsci writes: 'L'ancien se meurt, le nouveau ne parvient pas à voir le jour, dans ce clair-obscur surgissent les monstres.'⁹³

Markers of the incessant flow of global exchanges, cars, trucks and planes are all of a sudden absent. The family finally reaches a supply warehouse for merchandise trains in which a disparate group of people have already settled, united by a common but thin hope: the passing of a convoy. The underlying hypothesis is that if trains operate, society has not completely collapsed, which echoes Paul Virilio's hopeful observation on the possible emergence of a democratic new world order sustained by the expansion of a railway network which reduces distances and therefore brings people together. He writes: 'Au XIXe siècle, on pense que le chemin de fer va faire la démocratie mondiale et réunir les peuples d'Europe en une seule agora. L'idée est que les chemins de fer vont favoriser la convivialité et la solidarité.'⁹⁴

By way of control, a man named Koslowski has started to implement a set of collective rules enforced by an armed militia. Cultural taboos are shattered. A wolf-type hierarchy has emerged from social chaos. When another rootless group of roaming people shows up at the warehouse, the latter is literally turned into a refugee camp. Adjustments are inevitable. An over-populated and post-class community has

⁹² *Le Temps du loup* (2002) Directed by Michael Haneke [Film]. France: Les Films du Losange.

⁹³ Gramsci, A. (1975) *Quaderni del Carcere* (Turin: Einaudi Publisher), p. 311.

⁹⁴ Virilio, P. (1996) *Cybermonde, la politique du pire* (Paris: Textuel, 'Conversation pour demain'), p. 20.

painfully materialised, immediately split between two divergent strategies on how to tackle the situation. Some are nostalgic for the old world order and hope for its restoration. Others have decided to organise themselves as best they can in order to create a viable and alternative commune. Both antagonistic conceptions try to reconcile their divergences.

Le Temps du loup is an anthropological and sociological experiment in which the characters appear like contestants who participate in a reality TV game that goes wrong and out of control. What matters is how atomised individuals who have been immersed in the glorification of their self-interests, social statuses and mass consumption for decades will manage to survive collectively whilst remaining sane and civilised. In the film, the distance between the viewers and the elements of the diegesis is erased. Flirting with *cinéma vérité*,⁹⁵ the film also approaches the spare style of a low-budget documentary with the systematic use of natural light, wood fires for outdoor shots and candles or petrol lamps for indoor ones. The dim and rather static shots reveal the scale of the silent debacle that has taken over the country. Adding to the sobriety of the camera shots, the absence of any element of soundtrack thickens the suffocating quietness of the empty countryside. No specific city name is ever mentioned. All the characters just belong to two distinct and classless categories: *de la ville* or *du village*, a distribution specific to any pre-industrialised society. In that respect, criticising the hegemony of the economy, Guy Debord writes: ‘La paralysie actuelle du développement historique total [...] fait du moment où commencent à disparaître la ville et la campagne, non le dépassement de leur scission, mais leur effondrement simultané.’⁹⁶ The storyline unravels the aftermath of the simultaneous collapse of both spaces. As tiny and countless micro-communities emerge, members start to actively trade with each other and barter economy becomes the dominant mode of exchange in a new kind of deglobalised era.

To close this section, representations of the educational environment have also been a recurrent and essential thematic element in *cinéma du labeur* through inspiring and multi-awarded features since the early 2000s, e.g. *Ça commence aujourd’hui*, *Être et avoir*, *L’Esquive*, *Entre les murs*, and *La cour de Babel*. These prove to be microcosmic snapshots of the social reality and the crisis of the republican institutions of the country through the school system. Education, the declining status of the

⁹⁵ See footnote n° 25 on page 100.

⁹⁶ Debord, G. (1992) *La société du spectacle*, op. cit., thèse 175, p. 169.

teacher as a role model and the notion of secularism are tackled tragically in Jean-Paul Lilienfeld's frantic drama *La Journée de la jupe* (English title: *Skirt Day*) released in 2009.⁹⁷

The film tells the story of Sonia Bergerac (Isabelle Adjani), an experienced but struggling French teacher working in a secondary school in the suburbs of Paris, one of those commonly labelled with the euphemised expression: *établissement en zone sensible*. After accidentally finding a gun in one of her pupils' bags and following a series of plot twists, the archetypal teacher makes the headlines by taking her class hostage. Despite having inadvertently injured a pupil, Bergerac is for the first time in her career in control and has no intention of letting this go. She is empowered by the weapon that puts an end to years of workplace frustrations. Her deed results in an ambiguous outcome insofar as she has no difficulty in capturing the group's attention. She teaches the perfect class, which under such circumstances paradoxically acknowledges the defeat of the state education system. Police negotiator Labouret's (Denis Podalydès) initiative to put the teacher in contact with her estranged parents sheds light on her working-class roots and North African origins, therefore 'opening class up to ethnic diversity while ensuring that ethnicity is connected to socio-economic disadvantage and not simply characterized in identitarian terms'.⁹⁸ This lifts a veil on her personal life and upbringing, which explains her present secularist radicalism. The protagonist represents the personification of the daily arduousness, isolation and creeping undermining with which teachers are confronted. As Véronique Bouzou puts it: 'Pourtant, si un professeur se pose avant tout en défenseur de la laïcité et de l'universalité des savoirs, sa mission a du plomb dans l'aile. En effet, il est confronté à la montée du communautarisme, d'un certain fondamentalisme religieux et de la misogynie qui en découle.'⁹⁹ Bearers of republican values such as secularism are hit hard by the crisis of transmission that affects such values.

⁹⁷ *La cour de Babel* (2014) Directed by Julie Bertuccelli [Film]. France: Pyramide Distribution; *Entre les murs* (2008) Directed by Laurent Cantet [Film]. France: Haut et Court Distribution; *L'Esquive* (2003) Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche [Film]. France: New Yorker Films; *Être et avoir* (2002) Directed by Nicolas Philibert [Documentary Film]. France: Les Films du Losange; *Ça commence aujourd'hui* (1999) Directed by Bertrand Tavernier [Film]. France: Little Bear & Les Films Alain Sarde; *La Journée de la jupe* (2009) Directed by Jean-Paul Lilienfeld [Film]. France: Rezo Films.

⁹⁸ O'Shaughnessy, M. (2007) *The New Face of Political Cinema, Commitment in French Film since 1995*, op. cit., p. 77.

⁹⁹ Bouzou, V. (2009) *Ces Profs qu'on assassine*, Collection 'Coup de gueule' (Paris: Jean-Claude Gawsewitch Editeur), p. 179.

In the film, class is explored as an economic category but also as a means of giving a sense of meaning to people's lives. Sadly, in Sonia's case, professional realisation has strongly depended on the rejection of her religious background. The reasons she cut ties with her family is linked to her marriage to a non-Muslim from whom she is divorced, her intransigent adherence to republican values as a teacher and the importance of being free to wear a skirt as a woman in the workplace. Yet, despite the tragic turn of events that leads to her death a sense of reconciliation between her dual identities becomes possible.¹⁰⁰ The secularist skirt against the religious veil is indeed the underlying thematic, which is also prevalent in Michel Houellebecq's dystopian novel *Soumission* wherein the protagonist, who is strolling through a shopping centre in the aftermath of the democratic election of an Islamic president in France, suddenly realises an imperceptible change in the women's clothes: 'Et l'habillement féminin s'était transformé, je le ressentis immédiatement sans parvenir à analyser cette transformation; [...] toutes les femmes étaient en pantalon. [...] les robes et les jupes avaient disparu. [...] un basculement objectif avait commencé de se produire.'¹⁰¹ Thus, the social significance propagated by the film and by Houellebecq is also that of the endemic machismo of males who pervert Islam for their own ends, either keeping females under their tight control or harassing them. Supported by female pupils who have overcome oppression by rejecting the tacit codes linked to religious communitarianism and by finding a voice to fight against the sexism they are subjected to, Sonia turns herself into an ephemeral post-May 68 and MLF¹⁰² role model in reverse¹⁰³ by stating her condition to Labouret:

Ce que je veux, c'est faire une déclaration à la télé. Je veux que dans les deux heures, le ministre de l'Education vienne annoncer à la télé que le gouvernement instaure un jour de la jupe une fois par an dans les collèges. Ce sera un jour où toutes les filles sont invitées à venir en jupe au collège. Un jour où l'Etat affirme qu'on peut mettre une jupe sans être une pute.

The abundant use of stereotypes and populist messages on religion, gender and racism are however underlined in an article by Bernard Girard in *Le Nouvel*

¹⁰⁰ Her demand won't be honoured as she is shot inside the lecture hall by two police infiltrators pretending to be TV reporters.

¹⁰¹ Houellebecq, M. (2015) *Soumission* (Paris: Editions Flammarion), p. 177.

¹⁰² *Mouvement de libération des femmes* founded in 1970.

¹⁰³ Interestingly, female pupils were not allowed to wear trousers and stockings in schools and colleges until after May 68. (In Michel, Y. (2008) 'Mai 68 et l'enseignement: Mise en place historique', Les Sciences de l'éducation – Pour l'Ère nouvelle (p. 27) [online] March Edition. Available from: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-sciences-de-l-education-pour-l-ere-nouvelle-2008-3-page-13.htm#pa27> [Accessed 20 September 2017]).

Observateur in which the film's treatment of the young from the *banlieues* relies too much on colonial tropes. He writes:

Pourquoi a-t-il fallu que Lilienfeld plante sa caméra là où il n'y a que des Noirs et des Arabes? Pourquoi, lorsque l'on veut montrer la violence et l'intolérance, ne montre-t-on jamais que les Arabes et les Noirs? Parce que les Arabes et les Noirs seraient culturellement ou génétiquement violents et intolérants? Que "La Journée de la jupe" soit encensée par l'extrême droite n'est pas le fait du hasard; on y retrouve avec le thème d'une immigration inassimilée et inassimilable les "évidences" martelées par Le Pen depuis un demi-siècle.¹⁰⁴

It is true that the film conveys an ambiguous message, that of progressive values of Western civilisation versus reactionary impulses of indigenous communities. Yet all things considered, *La Journée de la jupe* remains a thought-provoking piece of work. It has had a tangible social impact, which supports the idea that cultural production has the power to unexpectedly trigger concrete initiatives. The concerted demand by female pupils on their rights to wear a skirt was voiced and debated through a spontaneous movement whose ideas inspired established non-profit organisations.¹⁰⁵ It therefore raises issues well beyond the scope of this work, notably Islam and feminism. According to Agnès Leclair in *Le Figaro*, a secondary school in the Ain department that had not allowed a group of female pupils to wear skirts to celebrate *La Journée de la jupe* was criticised by the organisation *Ni putes ni soumises*.¹⁰⁶ In relation to both metonymic elements (the skirt and the veil), the above crystallises and complicates the on-going and tense debate between secularism and communitarianism challenged by a creeping Islamophobia and class-related issues.¹⁰⁷ Thus, communitarianism and religious fundamentalism are considered unambiguous and reactive markers of preservation against secularism and globalisation by extension. The latter's paradoxical, evasive and chaotic nature is encapsulated by philosopher Régis Debray who states:

¹⁰⁴ Girard, B. (2009) "'La Journée de la jupe', la triple imposture', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 02 April. Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-nos-vies-connectees/20090402.RUE9459/la-journee-de-la-jupe-la-triple-imposture.html> [Accessed 22 March 2015].

¹⁰⁵ See Duportail, J. (2014) 'Journée de la jupe: à l'origine, un mouvement spontané de lycéennes', *Le Figaro* [online] 14 May. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2014/05/14/01016-20140514ARTFIG00160-journee-de-la-jupe-a-l-origine-un-mouvement-spontane-de-lyceennes.php> [Accessed 16 June 2015].

¹⁰⁶ See Leclair, A. (2012) 'Des collégiennes privées de jupes et renvoyées chez elles', *Le Figaro* [online] 09 March. Available from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/03/09/01016-20120309ARTFIG00510-des-collegiennes-privées-de-jupes-et-renvoyées-chez-elles.php> [Accessed 22 March 2015].

¹⁰⁷ See Ervine, J. (2013) *Cinema and the Republic, Filming on the Margins in Contemporary France* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).

Il nous faut appréhender la mondialisation sous son double aspect de repliement micro et de redéploiement macro, de perte et d'invention des traditions. La production de localismes avec leur recherche de signes discriminants ne nie pas la globalisation, elle est produite par elle. Chaque déracinement physique ou mental libère un contre-enracinement fantasmatique, légendaire ou ritualiste. Il y aurait ainsi à l'œuvre comme un *thermostat de l'appartenance*, qui viendrait corriger par un intégrisme mental les atteintes portées à l'intégrité physique du groupe traditionnel.¹⁰⁸

Finally, this social phenomenon is not incompatible with the profound schism that has emerged between a disenfranchised white working class more prone to abstain or vote for the National Front, and those originating from a depoliticized and ghettoised North African background, which has undoubtedly resulted in weakening the working class as a legitimate social entity and a political force.¹⁰⁹

This section has examined films in which the absence of organised forms of opposition leads to extreme situations where individuals in crisis let down by society rely on guns to regain control in order to survive in an unforgiving world. It has shown that insofar as politics and class have receded from the place of work, hyper individuality is the only alternative left to make a difference with catastrophic consequences, which makes the fluctuating genre and plot-lines juicier. Next, we will explore how the neo-liberal narrative spinning exploitation as a peripheral and disconnected phenomenon is challenged within six different motion pictures. We will examine how a reappropriation of social significance takes place insofar as the characters unknowingly bear a political message, that of self-emancipation. They are thus re-immersed into a socio-economic reality from which they should be inseparable and against which they attempt to develop new strategies of resistance. When they succeed, these strategies have the potential to break the mould of their exploitation and alienation.

¹⁰⁸ Conseil supérieur de la Formation et de la Recherche Stratégiques (2014) Intervention de M. Régis Debray. CSFRS [online] 21 November. Available from: https://www.csfrs.fr/sites/default/files/3_regis_debray_0.pdf [Accessed 20 May 2017].

¹⁰⁹ Baralon, M. (2017) 'Front national ou abstention: comment votent les ouvriers', *Europe 1* [online] 15 March. Available from: <http://www.europe1.fr/politique/front-national-ou-abstention-comment-votent-les-ouvriers-3003602> [Accessed 07 September 2017].

3. Corporate secrets and lies exposed through film

Dans tous les cas, il [le travail] permet à chacun de construire un édifice avec des systèmes de valeur, des comportements, des organisations mentales d'ouverture ou de défense. Lorsque le travail est menacé ou interrompu, toute cette construction se fissure ou s'écroule. (Baudrier-Achard, M-O. (2006) *Les restructurations dans les entreprises et la santé*, p. 5).

Since the late 1990s, numerous films have located their plot-lines against the backdrop of the corporate world; portraying atomised executives as the fall guys let down by an economic model they have however served with unlimited devotion. Laurent Cantet's second long feature, *L'emploi du temps* (English title: *Time Out*) is a prime example of such a trend.¹¹⁰ It is much darker and more pessimistic than *Ressources humaines* (see Section One). Released in 2001, The film gives a chilling insight into what characterised a decade dominated by the apprehension of losing one's job and not being capable of overcoming the trauma and eventually engaging with other viable alternatives; whereas in other films examined in this chapter the apprehension of going to work prevails. In point of fact, both asymmetrical fears encapsulate today's contradictory and complex relationship between the status of work and that of the workers, as touched on in previous chapters.¹¹¹

When businessman Vincent finds out that he has been fired, he cannot come to terms with the fact that his reputation and middle-class lifestyle are under threat and pretends to carry on business as usual by constructing a vast web of lies to keep it secret from his wife, children and parents. Such a deceitfulness is more bearable than having to confess to his relatives that he was rejected by the economic system of which he was precisely not only a pure product but also a success story. Working for the UN and having to go to Switzerland to attend important meetings on a regular basis are part of the elaborate and desperate scenario he builds for his trusting relatives. The character's strategy of resistance is built on an absolute untruth. He roams from city to city, from motel car parks to petrol-stations. He sleeps in his car for most of the time spent away from home. Like a Beckettian drifter driven by absurdist motives, he haunts the corporate world and this mirage works for a while; killing time in the seating areas of hotels' lobbies, in his suit, wearing a tie and carrying an attaché-case, pretending that his presence there is justified by appointments even when he is kindly asked to leave the premises by a suspicious

¹¹⁰ *L'emploi du temps* (2001) Directed by Laurent Cantet [Film]. France: Haut et Court Distribution.

¹¹¹ The film is loosely adapted from an even more tragic real event, that of Jean-Claude Romand, who pretended to his wife, children and parents that he worked as a GP for 18 years before assassinating them when they were about to discover his lie.

security guard. Swindling old acquaintances with bogus investments and mixing with petty traffickers on the Swiss border is what he ends up doing to get by, to the point where his lies become uncontrollable. In this respect, Peter Bradshaw perfectly encapsulates the zeitgeist of the 2000s and of the workplace, which are both fundamental aspects of the film. He writes:

Time Out is a film which asks powerful questions about how and why men think of themselves as inseparable from their careers, that without a job they lose not merely money and status but also their identities. In not merely being unemployed, but in flouting convention in this determined and criminal way, Vincent terrifyingly exposes the world of work as a busy diversion from a bottomless void of our own making.¹¹²

In the final scene, a brief close-up on the protagonist in the middle of a job interview suggests that he will probably be reinserted into the world of work but yet will forever remain an executive ghost, the shadow of a narcissistically wounded man. The point of view shot of the off-frame interviewer closes in on Vincent whose existence depends on the former's decision to hire him or not. Either way, the *Verdinglichung*¹¹³ of the individual is irreversible. In Cantet's own words: 'Nous voulions que le public soit triste que le personnage retrouve un travail à la fin, car cela signifiait pour nous qu'il avait perdu. Certains ont cru au contraire qu'il s'agissait d'un happy end.'¹¹⁴ In this instance, *cinéma du labeur* morphs again into a *cinéma du chômage de masse*. If the protagonist's entangled lies have been substituted for Bruno Davert's gun (see *Le Couperet* (Costa-Gavras: 2004) in the previous section), the similarities between the two characters are telling. Their motives are about regaining their position in society at any cost through the totemic status of work, saving their middle-class way of life and their family and keeping up appearances to match neo-liberal expectations and demands. Similar to Stockholm syndrome in which victims empathise with their captors, they sacrifice their integrity and humanity by remaining the captives of capital.

In a more satirical manner, Mathias Gokapi's *Rien de personnel* explores the same mechanisms of preservation at a lavish reception organised by the senior management of a pharmaceutical company.¹¹⁵ Their objective is to eliminate dozens of middle-managers who are unaware of their goal; a down-sizing necessity to make the firm

¹¹² Bradshaw, P. (2002) 'Time out', *The Guardian* [online review] 05 April. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2002/apr/05/1> [Accessed 01 April 2015].

¹¹³ Reification (translated from German).

¹¹⁴ Blotti re, M. (2007) 'Le cin ma se met au travail', *T l rama* [online] 08 September. Available from: http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/15669-le_cinema_se_met_au_travail.php [Accessed 04 April 2015], op. cit.

¹¹⁵ *Rien de personnel* (2009) Directed by Mathias Gokapi [Film]. France: Kar  Productions & Canal +.

more financially attractive to imminent buyers. Canapés, champagne and a string quartet to accompany pieces sung by the CEO himself are carefully staged diversions of this fool's game. Professional actors are hired to assess and identify the targeted guests through elaborate role-play. The same story is filmed three times from the point of view of different narrators, which 'renvoie comme dans un miroir déformant les impitoyables techniques mises au point dans le laboratoire industriel aux fins de gestion humaine'.¹¹⁶ When the hidden agenda becomes apparent, saving one's job becomes a survival of the fittest. Despite the tense atmosphere, glimpses of sincerity and individual resilience surface, highlighting the absurdity of the rules through which the corporate world operates. The whole plot eventually backfires and the corporate world is turned on its head. Mistaken for the CEO, the immigrant toilet attendant leaves the party in a company car whilst the former remains locked and forgotten in a toilet cubicle. As outlined throughout this chapter, pure entertainment and suspense perfectly serve *cinéma du labeur*'s popularity.

The smears and intrigues of corporations are astutely paralleled to that of sport in *Fair Play*, a full-length film based on *Squash*, a multi-award-winning short made by film-maker Lionel Bailliu.¹¹⁷ Office spaces are non-existent, replaced by open-air or indoor sport facilities wherein unbridled neo-liberalism leads to a merciless competition with devastating consequences. In *Squash*, the match between director Charles (Eric Savin) and newly promoted young Alexandre (Jérémy Renier) turns into a direct psychological and physical confrontation that forces the latter to fight back and win at any cost in order to save his position. This condition is bluntly set by angry, frustrated and threatening boss Charles halfway through the game: 'Considère ce match comme l'entretien préalable en vue de ton licenciement!' In *Fair Play*, the plot unfolds through specific sport sessions (rowing, squash, the fitness trail, golf, canyoning and workouts). Each session amplifies the merciless struggles for the highest positions as the commonly shared rules that define sporting spirit in theory are totally inverted and ridiculed in this fictional Fenwick-type company (see Section Two of Chapter Two).

¹¹⁶ Mandelbaum, J. (2009) "'Rien de personnel": comédie de dupes en entreprise', *Le Monde* [online review] 15 September. [Accessed 22 July 2017].
http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2009/09/15/rien-de-personnel-comedie-de-dupes-en-entreprise_1240786_3476.html [Accessed 22 July 2017].

¹¹⁷ *Fair Play* (2005) Directed by Lionel Bailliu [Film] op. cit.; *Squash* (2004) Directed by Lionel Bailliu [Short Film]. France: TETRA MEDIA.

The transposition (from the open-plan office to the open air) turns competitiveness into a deadly confrontation. Blocking someone else's promotion or being in Charles' good books, there are no holds barred. Manipulation, intimidation, bullying, backstabbing, blackmailing, unbridled misogyny and sexual harassment underpin the code of conduct of the small team of commercials at loggerheads with each other. Organising a canyoning session over a weekend is the solution Charles comes up with. But what is supposed to improve the team spirit and develop a sense of solidarity in face of the natural hurdles they have to overcome together turns into tragedy. As Dominique Huez ironically observes: 'Il ne suffit pas d'envoyer une équipe faire un stage de saut à l'élastique, de survie dans la forêt ou de *paintball* – comme certaines directions des ressources humaines en organisent pour des cadres ou des employés – pour créer de la solidarité et une motivation commune.'¹¹⁸

The extreme situations into which the characters are thrown in the parabolic canyon, an allegorical and amplified projection of the corporate world, allow the pre-existing conflictual tensions to reach a climax. The wilderness is no sanctuary from the pandemic cruelty of the globalised workplace. Revelations and score-settlings rage whilst the water level keeps increasing dangerously. The core political message of the film is somewhat dark and pessimistic. Executive Alexandre only owes his survival to the fact that he abandons his colleagues who have decided to put aside their grievances and carry injured Charles. Their altruist act to express solidarity costs them their lives as it prevents them from escaping the sudden flood in time. The market wins insofar as Alexandre is promoted to senior manager.

Corporate secrets and lies are also outlined through the thematics of harassment and resistance during a restructuring in Fabrice Cazeneuve's *De gré ou de force*, the third long feature in this section.¹¹⁹ The fact-based drama released in 1998 avoids falling into the trap of clichéd easy options and is considered an unheralded landmark. The complexities at stake in the workplace are addressed with no political correctness or excessive narrative mannerisms but with raw honesty. The lengthy opening scene, interrupted by intercalated credits, takes place during a professional interview between members of the senior management of a company and protagonist Sébastien Jalabier (Philippe Duclos). He is the epitome of the serial *nettoyeur*, a highly competent and independent consultant specialising in cutbacks, a *spécialiste du*

¹¹⁸ Huez, D. (2008) *Souffrir au travail, comprendre pour agir*, op. cit., p. 82.

¹¹⁹ *De gré ou de force* (1998) Directed by Fabrice Cazeneuve [Film] op. cit.

dégraissage, to use the appropriate and infamous French designation. As a matter of future projection, Jalabier could be what young consultant Philippe in *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (Moutout: 2004) would have become in 20 years' time (see Section One).¹²⁰ When it comes to displaying his expertise, the consultant does not mince his words:

Il faut leur faire comprendre qu'ils sont inutiles, les traiter comme des moins que rien, les ignorer ostensiblement, les contraindre à un travail dégradant, les ridiculiser, les calomnier aussi. On peut se moquer d'une infirmité, d'une conviction politique, religieuse, culturelle. Le but étant bien sûr de leur faire une vie suffisamment infernale pour qu'ils partent d'eux-mêmes sans indemnité ou licenciement. [...] J'ai dégraissé avec succès quarante et une entreprises. Vous pouvez les contacter. Elles vous confirmeront l'efficacité de mon travail.

His final request is to have at his disposal a basement with no windows to which the nine employees are to be transferred immediately. Thus physically marginalised, the group will be even less inclined to put up any resistance, a strategy to make it easier for the consultant to round up each individual in a claustrophobic environment. In order to outsmart Jalabier, Vincent, one of the targeted employees, adopts an effective strategy by studying in depth *le Code du travail* and therefore not missing a single opportunity to undermine the consultant's deeds and directives with legal counter-arguments.¹²¹

Pride is a salient element for social recovery. Akin to Sandra in the Dardenne Brothers' *Deux jours, une nuit* who refuses to be re-instated as this would cost one of her supportive fellow-workers his job, Vincent's moral integrity is his bedrock.¹²² In an attempt to nail the inherent social tension that defines the Dardennes' characters, Jim Wolfreys writes that, '[h]emmed in by constraints, they [the Dardennes' characters] are stripped down to their most basic elements and forced to dredge up

¹²⁰ His fees are thus calculated pro-rata, based on two months' wages of any employee he gets rid of as well as a deadline of three months also set by him to complete the mission.

¹²¹ Interestingly, one of the key measures of the Macron government to reform labour legislation to the advantage of the employer could soon invalidate the strategy adopted by the protagonist. The implementation of laws increasing labour market deregulation needs to be matched by new strategies of resistance by the targeted workers within an incessant power struggle. (See Peillon, L. (2017) 'Réforme du code du travail: la précarité pour tous?', *Libération* [online] 28 June. Available from: http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/06/28/reforme-du-code-du-travail-la-precarite-pour-tous_1580295 [Accessed 02 July 2017]).

¹²² *Deux jours, une nuit* (2014) Directed by Luc & Jean-Pierre Dardenne [Film]. Belgium: Les Films du Fleuve.

from within the resources required to survive.¹²³ Despite ending up being jobless in both films, Sandra and Vincent are strengthened by the nobility of their actions and therefore capable of starting afresh with a clear conscience, in sharp contrast to those who have brought havoc to their lives.

Yet, *De gré ou de force* provides an overview of what the potency of minor collective actions could still deliver. A climax is reached in the last but one scene, which takes place during the Christmas celebration. Contrary to all expectations and thanks to the administrators' subterranean activism, all the other employees' children give their own presents to Vincent's ostracised children, saving him by a narrow margin from the worst humiliation in public. For fear of a strike and maybe more collective actions to come, the CEO decides to fire the consultant and make the employee redundant while complying with legislation in effect. The poetic justice of time participates to the realisation of a greater social significance. If the protagonist personifies resistance, the nature of the fight has shifted insofar as it is not about saving one's job but being made redundant in compliance with the applicable laws. As a lesser evil, the ethically empowered father finds a new job a few months later, which suggests that his resilience and high moral standards are rewarded. Such an ending is subject to antagonistic interpretations. Is it just a Pyrrhic victory for a single resilient employee supported by a far-fetched and melodramatic denouement or a mere swan song for those actions that belong to a bygone era insofar as class solidarity has ceased to be systematic? Either way, the slow burning impact of the film is indubitable, according to film director Cazeneuve who provides an answer to the question by explaining:

L'option choisie était de ne pas faire un documentaire social mais plutôt une fable contemporaine, afin de mieux faire passer le côté manichéen de l'histoire. L'atmosphère de huis clos et la tension extrême au sein de l'entreprise se sont imposées au fur et à mesure de la mise en scène. Curieusement, je ne me suis rendu compte de l'aspect militant du film que bien après la fin du tournage. [...] Ce qui était très drôle, par ailleurs, dans les différentes projections, c'est que, malgré la gravité du sujet, les gens sortaient de la salle littéralement galvanisés.¹²⁴

As a matter of fact, such an observation echoes the viewers' reaction to Cantet's *Ressources humaines* (see Section One) and to Ruffin's *Merci patron!* (see conclusion of Chapter Two). These experiences highlight the purposefulness of *cinéma du labeur* and might also give some directors the impetus to renew their contribution to a genre

¹²³ Wolfreys, J. (2008) 'Reality bites', *Socialist Review* [online] December Edition, n° 331. Available from: <http://socialistreview.org.uk/331/reality-bites> [Accessed 29 July 2017].

¹²⁴ *De gré ou de force* by Fabrice Cazeneuve (1998) *Autour du 1^{er} mai, le cinéma en partage* [online]. Available from: http://www.autourdulerm.ai.fr/bdf_fiche-film-602.html [Accessed 28 August 2015].

that has gained an increasing audience and influence since the late 1990s.¹²⁵ The growing interest of such films is perhaps proportional to the decline of organised counterpowers even. This demonstrates that political expectations and aspirations show on the contrary the capacity to rally vigorously when channelled by a convincing medium even if ‘un film, si politique soit-il, reste un film, c’est-à-dire un produit culturel dont la consommation est facultative, aléatoire, et dont l’impact et l’efficacité pédagogiques demeurent limités [...] il ne suffit pas d’un film pour faire un individu militant.’¹²⁶ The loss of influence or the absence of the unions and that of a Marxist narrative nonetheless remain in the background, perhaps increasing by default the artists’ responsibility vis-à-vis the excluded and those less inclined to defend themselves. As Tom McCarthy insists:

In our society, the artist may have no executive power whatsoever, but their ace-card lies in the fact that they command a means – perhaps the primal one – of putting value in the world: a means of making meanings. They can use this status to subvert, or to shore up, power – sometimes both at the same time – and they can do this well, badly or indifferently; but one thing they can never do is be politically neutral.¹²⁷

Thus, if class struggle still occurs within the place of work, it is in a more subterranean fashion. Interestingly, in the films of *cinéma du labeur* the role of the ‘lone whistleblower’ often replaces that of the militant who is generally supported and shielded by an organised body. Like ordinary workers who set aside their anonymity, like bothersome Davids taking on the corporate Goliath, the protagonists are in most cases defined by a deep sense of social solitude, servitude (voluntary or not) and frailty that can only be transcended by the strength of their individual values and actions.

Elements of the business thriller are also central to *cinéma du labeur*. A pivotal role in workplace-related issues such as managerial cover up and suicide is thus drawn up in Fabienne Godet’s *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (English title: *Burn Out*).¹²⁸ Well-served by peripheral plot twists, the Hollywoodian reference and aestheticism of the character of the executive-fugitive is unequivocal in this action-

¹²⁵ See Cadé, M. (2000) *L’écran bleu, la représentation des ouvriers dans le cinéma français* (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, Collection Études), p. 176.

¹²⁶ Esparbes, J. (2005) ‘L’engagement dans le cinéma français contemporain’, Université Lyon 2 [online] http://doc.sciencespo-lyon.fr/Ressources/Documents/Etudiants/Memoires/Cyberdocs/MFE2005/esparbes_j/pdf/esparbes_j.pdf [Accessed 02 September 2017], p. 17.

¹²⁷ McCarthy, T. (2016) ‘Don’t call me a British artist – I am thoroughly European’, *The Guardian* [online] 08 October. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/08/british-artist-european-writers-politically-neutral> [Accessed 08 October 2016].

¹²⁸ *Sauf le respect que je vous dois* (2005) Directed by Fabienne Godet [Film] op. cit.

packed and pacey film.¹²⁹ Its Hitchcockian opening scene in which the protagonist is involved in a night-time car chase on a country road, which is immediately followed by a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards, sets the framework of the plot.¹³⁰ Thus, it emerges that François (Olivier Gourmet) pursues director Bruner in order to confront the latter regarding Simon's odd dismissal and subsequent suicide. The chauffeur loses control and both passengers die in the accident. The fatal outcome is linked with François' disappearance in the press, which is more likely to make the public hold its breath than the unfortunate but trivial suicide of a 'difficult' employee of the tertiary sector.

Indeed, life is not rosy in this suburban Parisian printing firm. Employees' docility matches their discontent as they are expected to work longer hours by the intimidating newly appointed Bruner who plays on their fear of the gloomy state of the economy and the need for permanent competitiveness in order to justify his unpopular methods of managerial control (as explored in Chapter One). Yet, rebellious temperamental Simon found it extremely difficult to comply whilst challenging his colleagues' resignation by openly criticising his boss, in vain.¹³¹ A sense of endemic disengagement and resignation prevails among staff. The absence of any trade union involvement reinforces such a perception. The idea that a 'lone insider' can win over management scheming is never guaranteed. It falls short in the case of François who pays a heavy price.

Arrested and sent to prison for manslaughter after a stay in a psychiatric hospital, he never becomes the social avenger he aspired to be. However Flora, a determined reporter, uncovers some troubling revelations in connection with Simon's suicide and confidential evidence that the company had planned to lay off about 30 more workers. The closing scene in which CEO Lunel quickly rushes to his car to avoid journalists' embarrassing questions suggests that top-management remains unscathed by the dire consequences of their actions although Flora's published article in which are revealed

¹²⁹ 'Pour le personnage-clé de Simon (Jean-Michel Portal), qui met fin à ses jours, la réalisatrice s'est inspirée d'une femme qui s'est réellement suicidée en s'enfermant dans sa voiture avec des bonbonnes de gaz, pour les mêmes raisons que le jeune homme dans le film.' *Allociné* [online] Available from: <http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-59116/secrets-tournage/> [Accessed 26 August 2015].

¹³⁰ In many ways, the protagonist echoes that of Alfred Hitchcock's film *North by Northwest* (1959).

¹³¹ In a conversation, one of the employees tells a colleague that Simon has lost his job because he was not able to 'adapt'. The colleague asks: 'Adapt to what?' Lost for words, the former simply replies: 'Adapt'.

the circumstances that led to Simon's death saves the day. Akin to the next film, social responsibility remains the prerogative of a providential whistleblower.

The roots and mechanisms of bellicose corporate secrets and lies are controversially explored in Nicolas Klotz's *La Question humaine* (English title: *Heartbeat Detector*) that condenses most of the thematics linked to globalisation within the microcosm of the French subsidiary of a German company, FC Farb.¹³² The film is an extraordinary example of the fusion of *cinéma du labeur*, *cinéma du lanceur d'alerte* and *cinéma du refoulé*. Released in 2008, the ambitious adaptation shares its title with that of a novel by François Emmanuel and echoes Claude Lanzmann's compelling documentary *Shoah* based on the Holocaust.¹³³ The plot is engineered like a doomed chess game through the cathartic narrative of Simon Kessler (Mathieu Amalric), the conscientious company psychologist – initially defined by one of his bosses as 'un subalterne certes obéissant mais sans imagination'¹³⁴ – whose sense of ethics and thirst for truth will turn him into a whistleblower. The protagonist finds himself embroiled in a cabal orchestrated by Deputy Manager Karl Rose (Jean-Pierre Kalfon), whose agenda is to topple CEO Mathias Jüst (Michael Lonsdale).

Despite the distance and the pathological secretiveness that he cultivates with his professional entourage, Jüst is presented as a man with principles and ethics. He has climbed the corporate ladder and, to an extent, embodies the values of Weberian capitalism characterised by sobriety and devotion deriving from Protestantism that glorifies the model of the self-made man, justly rewarded for a life of hard work and unfailing dedication.¹³⁵ However, he had played a significant part in the last restructuring, which he rigorously handled with great and uncompromising professionalism insofar as, as revealed through Kessler's voiceover: 'Ses décisions étaient sans appel, même s'il les précédait d'une concertation de façade.' On the other hand, career-driven Karl Rose, the company's number two, clearly embodies the qualities by which modern management is defined: 'C'était un quadragénaire

¹³² *La Question humaine* (2008) Directed by Nicolas Klotz, Sophie Dulac Distribution.

¹³³ Emmanuel, F. (2000) *La Question humaine*, (Paris: Editions Stock, Le Livre de Poche); *Shoah* (1985) Directed by Claude Lanzmann [Documentary Film]. France: New Yorkers Films.

¹³⁴ See Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), wherein the statuses and identities of the subaltern are extensively explored.

¹³⁵ Weber, M. (1992) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London & New York: Routledge).

séducteur, aisément démagogue, tutoyant ses secrétaires, aimant se mêler aux employés, dont il connaissait souvent les prénoms.’

The interpenetration of the economy and of the ideology of the far-right is at the heart of the film. As the storyline develops, Jüst has discovered some illegal financial transactions in connection with an extremist group associated with a paramilitary militia, which mirrors the links between Rose and the Lebensborn Movement of which he is a pure product.¹³⁶ Though a pale imitation of the Lebensborn Movement, the army of executives possess the same characteristics and background. They are trained to show an inalterable devotion to capital and also share the absence of any form of guilt or compassion. Kessler’s role is to nurture those features. In his own thoughts, he observes: ‘J’ai vu dans ces séminaires des hommes d’âge mûr pleurer comme des gamins. J’ai assisté à des déballages brutaux, des accès de violence folle. Il était de mon rôle de les canaliser vers l’unique objectif qui m’était assigné: faire de ces cadres des soldats, des chevaliers d’entreprise, des subalternes compétitifs.’

The process of dehumanisation is completed when Kessler interviews and films, thus producing a short film within the film, a young candidate who is applying for an executive position and speaks openly about his disgust for touching food, a confession that shakes the neutrality of the psychologist even though he eventually offers him the job. The candidate’s phobia underlines the process of robotising and endemic cloning that sets the norm in the corporate world. The selection criteria for the position are specifically based on personality, the level of dehumanisation, and the praise for the company that the candidate expresses through a pre-learned script. He represents one of ‘ces jeunes amants du libéralisme économique’, in Klotz’s own words.¹³⁷ Through training, appraisals, evaluations and conditioning emerges a culture of enterprise that possesses all the control patterns of the concentration camp system, suggestively mirrored by the still and recurrent shots of the company premises with smoking chimneys.¹³⁸ They echo those of the heavily industrialised Ruhr region that are seen at the end of Claude Lanzmann’s *First Era*, which concludes the first part of *Shoah*.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ ‘Lebensborn’ means ‘wellspring of life’ or ‘fountain of life’. The project was founded by Heinrich Himmler in December 1935 to encourage SS and Wehrmacht officers to have children exclusively with Aryan women. Himmler believed Lebensborn children would build a Nazi-Aryan nation.

¹³⁷ In Blottière, M. (2007) ‘Le cinéma se met au travail’, *Télérama* [online] 08 September. Available from: http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/15669-le_cinema_se_met_au_travail.php [Accessed 04 April 2015], op. cit.

¹³⁸ McCalmont, J. (2010) ‘Heartbeat Detector (2007) – Re-Engineering Ethical Process Outcomes’, *Ruthless Culture* [online review] 06 May. Available from:

Kessler is split into two distinctly incompatible worlds, that of daily corporate obligations and of nocturnal concert cafés with his loving friends and girlfriend who are totally alien to the corporate sector. Music plays a fundamental role insofar as it holds the key for the denouement. The fado singer who performs in one of these cafés has a profound impact on him, which suggests that music has the power to redeem and soothe mankind's political atrocities. Nothing else is implicitly closer to answering the human question than the uncompromising still close-ups showing the solo performer singing a lengthy song. Inversely, the violence and beastliness on the dance floors of nightclubs or those of a dark derelict warehouse are, for the executives, the only means of unwinding, through throbbing lights and entrancing techno tunes. Events of this sort are part of FC Farb's official social programme. The large consumption of amphetamines and cocaine reveals the addictive penchants in the world of corporations,¹⁴⁰ of which CEO protagonist Marc Tourneuillerie is a prime example in Stéphane Osmont's *Le Capital* (see Section Three of Chapter Four). This highlights the rave's primal function, which is a perfect steam-venting outlet wherein inhibited impulses have a chance to surface unhindered. Inversely, in a sequence set the morning after, the presence of foreign cleaners (the only representatives of an amorphous working class) working around the scattered bodies of the comatose young following the wild night, exposes an absurd facet of the modern workplace. Furthermore, if music undeniably functions like a protective compound against losing reason, it is paradoxically the medium that triggers and precipitates Jüst's fall.

Under the boiling surface of the main plot and its settlings of scores, disturbing secrecies are unleashed. The former quartet's musicians, whom Kessler approaches individually, will allow him to progressively assemble the pieces of the puzzle which leads him to unravel the terrible secrets that Jüst has bottled up and also reveals a

<http://ruthlessculture.com/2010/05/06/heartbeat-detector-2007-re-engineering-ethical-process-outcomes/> [Accessed 04 April 2015].

¹³⁹ The catastrophe (translated from Hebrew).

¹⁴⁰ Economic boom or bust alike, professional stamina in the Square Mile in London goes along with increasing addictions to Class A drugs that are commonplace among traders aged between 25 and 40, according to *The Financial Times* (In Boxell, J. (2009) 'Cocaine use in the City still "a real problem"', *The Financial Times* [online] 27 October. Available from: <https://www.ft.com/content/59f94172-c332-11de-8eca-00144feab49a?mhq5j=e3>). Furthermore, *The Guardian* hypothesises that an excessive use of cocaine among traders and bankers around the world's financial places played a significant part in the international economic meltdown in 2008. (In Anderson, G. (2013) 'Did cocaine use by bankers cause the global financial crisis?' *The Guardian* [online] 15 April. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/shortcuts/2013/apr/15/cocaine-bankers-global-financial-crisis>) [Accessed 04 April 2014].

disturbing truth at the heart of Karl Rose's murky origins that are linked to the eugenics fundamentalism of the Third Reich. A mysterious analogy is established between the pieces of music the chamber orchestra used to play and the coded documents anonymously sent to Kessler. Both are extremely precise and technical, and, in the case of the music, strangely soulless.¹⁴¹ In FC Farb's slick offices, one of the worst political catastrophes of 20th-century Europe resurfaces. The story has its roots in a gruesome chain of events that took place decades ago, a human tragedy that goes along with that of language, '[...] cette plaque sensible sur laquelle se fixent impitoyablement tous les crimes et toutes les horreurs, lors même que les coupables pensent pouvoir camoufler, dénier, escamoter.'¹⁴² Behind the company's activities, a repressed and barbaric unconscious is lifted to consciousness through painful historical hermeneutics revealed by the pivotal role of the protagonist.

Jüst's aversion for words and expressions such as *sélection* and *plan de restructuration* is justified by the same targeted lexis that was used by his own father, a Nazi officer, in order to rationalise and maximise to perfection the Final Solution in his daily reports. What is revealed is that the gradually appearing technical lexis did not disappear at the end of World War Two but instead has been discreetly mutating - from Klemperer's LTI to Hazan's LQR, as explored in Section Two of Chapter One. From innuendos, confessions and testimonies to fragmented and anonymous documents or reports, an almost untraceable linguistic cancer takes over in the film and the few who notice this transformation are silenced. Klemperer states: 'Le pas véritablement décisif vers la mécanisation de la vie par le langage n'est franchi que lorsque la métaphore technique vise directement la personne ou, comme le dit une expression qui sévit depuis le début du siècle: lorsqu'elle est réglée sur elle.'¹⁴³ Directly derived from an Arendtian perspective (see Section Two of Chapter Two), the carrying out of World War Two atrocities comes to light through the use of a pseudo-technical language that has the ability to make horror acceptable to ordinary workers as it integrates the perpetration of genocides into the humdrum of routine, that of the van drivers gassing their 'commodities' day in, day out.

¹⁴¹ In a conversation with Kessler, laboratory operator Michel Paolini, who also played in the former quartet, remarks that Jüst's talent as a musician was unconvincing. Indeed the former describes his boss's technique as 'un besoin de maîtrise qui fait fuir la musique'.

¹⁴² Klemperer, V. (1996) *LTI, La langue du IIIe Reich*, op. cit., p. 366.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

First and foremost, the film sheds light on the possible transfer of Taylorist methods to achieving mass killing. Somehow, the Taylorist objectives are clearly set: to meet the deadlines and targets so the whole process can run smoothly. As Jim Wolfreys writes: ‘The reification of existence under capitalism, which turns human beings into objects to be bought and sold, found its grotesque expression in the Holocaust, where assembly lines techniques and a modern transport network were used to commit mass murder, leaving what remained – teeth, human hair, etc – to be treated as industrial “byproducts”’.¹⁴⁴ No waste, a paragon of efficiency, the Holocaust paradigm pushes global neo-liberalism to uncharted territory; a concentrationary economic system in which human resources are in the strict sense of the term self-consumed. Would a Shoah-like tragedy be sped up as a result? *La Question humaine* therefore exposes Nazism as an expression of Taylorism turned ‘anthropophagous’. The next hypothetical step is to consider the logistics and monitoring of the death camps set by a cutting-edge computerised system, as the film and novel both extrapolate and warn. In the final reel, the origin of the film’s English title *Heartbeat Detector* is revealed:

[...] la technologie franco-britannique de lutte contre les clandestins utilise désormais la détection électronique dans les camions par repérage des émanations de gaz carbonique par la respiration, et tout récemment la mise en place du ‘heartbeat detector’, plus performant, qui permet de repérer les battements de cœur.¹⁴⁵

The fate of Jüst remains unknown. In the epilogue, he lies in the psychiatric ward of a hospital, vaguely recovering from a suicide attempt. He is unable to overcome the guilt passed on by his father who never took responsibility for his role in the systematic extermination of Jews in wartime Poland. As for Karl Rose, ‘enfant de l’Ordre Noir, enfant de personne, enfant d’une autre variété d’enfants, tous parfaits et semblables, enfant sans enfance, ni cœur, ni âme, ni descendance, enfant de la nouvelle et pure génération technique’, to quote Kessler’s voiceover, one can assume that no one will stand in his way of becoming the next vice-president of the French subsidiary. Yet a sliver of hope exists for mankind as redemption can be attained by music for diegetic whistleblower Arie Neumann (the poison-pen-letter-writer and ex-FC Farb quartet member who has turned into an accomplished musician) and Simon Kessler. (In the novel, the young man decides to end his career in order to start a new one as a social carer.) For both archetypal whistleblowers, salvation is only possible

¹⁴⁴ Wolfreys, J. (1999) *The Physiology of Barbarism*, International Socialism n° 83, p. 151.

¹⁴⁵ Hazan, E. (2006) *LQR, La propagande du quotidien*, op. cit., see footnote on page 13 of the book.

faraway from the corporate world and can be attained through artistic or social dedication.

Conclusion of Chapter Three

This chapter has served to dissect the mechanisms and impacts of globalisation on the workforce within storylines and plots from specific films through characterisation and dramatisation. Each production has addressed a specific socio-economic snapshot of France through multifaceted and class-related characters who struggle against all sorts of control; ultimately challenging the workplace of a supposedly pacified society embedded within globalisation.

Thus, archetypal characters acting as whistleblowers are preponderant. Using whistleblowing as a major act of resistance means to strike hard and only once. Their prerogative is to ‘cut out the middle man’, or more precisely intermediary bodies, out of distrust, whether this is justified or not, in order to reveal what they have discovered with maximum impact. Rightly or wrongly, those bodies are considered a hindrance that could slow down or even derail the individual’s determination. Though protected by law,¹⁴⁶ there is no such thing as an organisation of whistleblowers in France. One can separate them into two categories: internal and external. Paradoxically, their deeds are individualistic but with a social, political and ethical conscience, depending on the nature of their revelations. There are also elements of foolishness and heroism insofar as they are ready to sacrifice themselves (the internal ones in particular) for a bigger cause, thus abnegating and also foreshadowing their individuality. In a society defined by unbridled individualism, they act alone. In an era defined by deunionisation, their role perfectly fits within *cinéma du labeur*, which is in many examples a *cinéma du lanceur d’alerte*.

Has class struggle become an entertaining topic for the cultural consumption of audiences who voyeuristically enjoy the frissons of rebellion by proxy and in scant comfort? After all, ‘the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I only need to close my eyes to

¹⁴⁶ See Roucous, D. (2017) ‘Lanceurs d’alerte, mieux protégés ou plus encadrés?’, *L’Humanité* [online] 20 April. Available from: <https://www.humanite.fr/lanceurs-dalerte-mieux-protectes-ou-plus-encadres-628630> [Accessed 29 July 2017].

suppress it.¹⁴⁷ If some of these films may be considered mere outlets, they nonetheless signify much more in terms of political referencing in my view.

In the next and final chapter, we shall examine how novelists have tackled control and resistance in the workplace. With an unquestionable success, the texts we will explore have sold well and have been adapted for cinema, TV and stage in significant numbers, thus increasing their influence in terms of reaching out to a new audience apt to engage and reconnect with politics. Such a trend has allowed us to identify and validate the emergence of a new kind of committed literature. We will reflect on whether this literature combined with other art forms has the potential to send a strong signal in terms of social significance and/or inspire political activism.

¹⁴⁷ Metz, C. in Powrie, P. & Reader, K. (2002) *French Cinema, A Student's Guide*, op. cit., p. 69.

Chapter Four

Littérature du labeur: Just a neologism?

1. Nailing the effects of globalisation in the post-68 era

2. The gentle toyotisation of the character in the business novel

3. The dystopian fiction: the market has won and resistance is pointless

4. Resistance(s)

‘Au déboulé garçon pointe ton numéro
Pour gagner ainsi le salaire
D’un morne jour utilitaire
Métro, boulot, bistro, mégots, dodo, zéro’
(Béarn, P. (1951) *Couleurs d’usine*).

The writings of literary fiction I have chosen to analyse in this chapter encapsulate in different ways the dysfunctions intrinsic to globalisation in the place of work. Published from the late 1960s to the present day, they testify through characterisation and plot development how individuals and groups position themselves, either by taking advantage and exploiting the worst features of neo-liberalism or by finding strategies to be protected from it. In terms of genre, they provide strong eclecticism, from black to burlesque comedy, naturalist to surrealist storylines, but also from auto- and semi-biographical to purely fictional tales and *romans d’anticipation réalistes*. If they all share the same goal, which is to expose the consequences of the disintegration of professional bodies, creeping precariousness, social alienation and unfettered competition, these writings differ in the way they offer alternatives.¹ Moreover, despite significant variations in terms of quality and reception, they share an identical grand narrative: rejuvenating awareness through the vulgarisation of socio-economic issues based on the difficult experiences of a single individual confronted by all sorts of miseries that today’s work organisation has induced and made commonplace. They either are in synch with specific historical and social contexts of contemporary France or utilise them in order to speculate and project our society into a dystopian parallel present or a hypothetical near future that works as a catalyst for today’s inequalities.

¹ Rather than those controlled and duplicated by the defenders of globalisation, alternative narratives also contribute to the worthwhileness of overcoming surrender and apathy through a galaxy of repelling or inspirational workplace characters.

In this respect some writings speculate what might happen when one does not resist or in the event that resistance is crushed to a point of no return (see Section Three).

Littérature du labeur is a neologism that I have created. It is not a counter movement that has emerged against a hypothetical *littérature du look*. What is verified for cinema (see Chapter Three), falls short in the case of literature. It is a hypothesis based on the frequency of atomised publications that have flourished, especially since the 1990s, cross-pollinated and been adapted for cinema or theatre, or serialised for television. It would be inaccurate to define it as a movement per se. There are no schools, committees or listed dogmas that are bound to officially establish the birth of a new genre, for the time being at least. ‘Literary whistleblowers’ such as Anna Sam, Philippe Claudel, Thierry Beinstingel and Gérard Mordillat, to name but a few, have never made a common statement in the media or drafted a manifesto that would be acknowledged as a founding act. Yet their works continue a literary tradition which tackles the power struggles in the world of work that emerged with *le roman réaliste* movement of the second half of the 19th century (see Conclusion of Chapter One).

We shall be cautious here. Most of the authors examined in this chapter have treated the workplace as a central theme to explore in one or more publications but this does not necessarily define their whole work. Their commitment might be occasional and fleeting. They write a book on work-related issues and move on to other creations in which the former might be absent. Moreover, some of them (the most contemporary ones in particular) are established and belong to France’s literary institution and market in a rather clear and unequivocal manner. One has therefore to question whether their reflections on ordinary workers and employees fighting for their jobs or dealing with daily issues in factories or offices are always true and not merely opportunistic. On the other hand, does one have to put their subjectivity to the test and work as a cashier or a call centre agent in order to write with accuracy about working conditions in supermarkets or call centres? The paradox between the validity of artistic production and the artist’s social origin is clarified by Herbert Marcuse. He writes:

The fact that the artist belongs to a privileged group negates neither the truth nor the aesthetic quality of his work. [...] The progressive character of art, its contribution to the struggle for

liberation cannot be measured by the artists' origins nor by the ideological horizon of their class. Neither can it be determined by the presence (or absence) of the oppressed class in their work.²

I shall construe that an implicit rationale emerges from these writings, and this might equate to new ways of expressing critical thinking and reactivating the culture and codes for subdued and overt manners of enacting resistance against a neo-liberalism operating with 'incorporation, negotiation and concession instead of overt oppression'.³ *Littérature du labeur* remains somewhat elusive, which makes its institutionalisation more complicated. However, in this respect, an official designation has emerged as *le roman d'entreprise*, which could be considered an attempt to partially recuperate *littérature du labeur* by the establishment.⁴ It has its own logistics and calendar and delivers an award on a yearly basis: *le Prix du roman d'entreprise et du travail*, controversially nicknamed 'Prix Darcos' by its detractors (Xavier Darcos, official founder of this initiative, was in charge of the above ministry in the Sarkozy conservative government until 2010.). Created in 2009, this award is organised by Place de la Médiation, Technologia and the ANDRH,⁵ three leading consulting firms in human resources. Nine novels are shortlisted in which thematics are based on the world of work. Fifteen public figures from different walks of life (business, literature, social affairs, etc) form the jury. It is chaired by the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Solidarity, who delivers a speech during the award ceremony.

Winners of the award since 2010
2010 – Delphine de Vigan pour son roman « Les Heures souterraines » (Lattès)
2011 – Laurent Gounelle pour son roman « Dieu voyage toujours incognito » (A. Carrière)
2012 – Jeanne Benameur pour son roman « Les insurrections singulières » (Actes Sud)
2013 – Aude Walker pour son roman « Un homme jetable » (Editions du Moteur)
2014 – Thomas Coppey pour son roman « Potentiel du sinistre » (Actes Sud)
2015 – Jean-Paul Didierlaurent pour son roman « Le lecteur du 6h27 » (Au Diable Vauvert)
2016 – Slimane Kader pour son roman « Avec vue sous la mer » (Allary éditions)

² Marcuse, H. (1978) *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

³ Hall, S. and others (1978) *Policing the crisis* (London: Macmillan).

⁴ The debate here is also whether one is witnessing the birth of a new movement based on a twin critique, the 'business novel' or 'novel of the enterprise' being one subgroup of a larger one that we have identified as 'literature of the workplace'.

⁵ Association Nationale des Directeurs des Ressources Humaines.

Even though ‘il ne suffit pas de dénoncer un système pour ne plus y appartenir’,⁶ the first award went rather awry following Gérard Mordillat’s refusal to be nominated and winner Delphine de Vigan’s decision to boycott her award ceremony. As the recuperation was marred from the outset, the proponents decided to mellow the initiative’s scope, regretting that ‘dans la première édition, les romans étaient très critiques. Ils ne parlaient pas assez du travail comme d'un accomplissement.’ As a consequence, the 2011 award was given to a less critical text in which the theme of work is treated in a more constructive light, hence ‘une approche de la valeur travail moins axée sur la victimologie.’⁷ Interestingly, the closing speech in 2013 delivered by Michel Sapin, Minister of Labour in the Hollande socialist government, exemplifies the attempt to recuperate critique. Most of his words are paradoxically borrowed from a leftist radical narrative.⁸

Even if ‘lire ne compte pas, ne pas lire n'empêche rien’,⁹ the award as a means of recuperation also allows these writings, and those that are shortlisted, to be given recognition, hence amplifying the exploration of the place of work by giving it a renewed and central place on the shelves of the bookshops. Akin to *cinéma du labeur*, *littérature du labeur* may have no dogma associated with it or clearly defined political solutions to offer the readers but possesses as of today some sort of record and pedagogical influence.

Before exploring contemporary works, we shall now introduce a few influential writings from the 1970s and the 1980s. It is worth noting that most of them are diaries, a genre that, first, connects the writer’s subjectivity with that of each reader in an intimate manner; second, imposes a sense of authenticity on which the latter can reflect; and third, voices the concerns of the silent majority, workers and employees who do not keep a personal diary yet crave visibility and recognition within society.¹⁰

⁶ Annette Levy-Willard reçoit Raphaël Enthoven. *radiorcj.info* [online video] 25 April. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8T0BLub67tA> [Accessed 05 May 2017].

⁷ Caviglioli, D. (2010) ‘Voici le roman d’entreprise’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 01 September. Available from: <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20100901.BIB5544/voici-le-roman-d-039-entreprise.html> [Accessed 09 October 2014].

⁸ Le discours du ministre du Travail. 2013. *Le Prix du roman d’entreprise et du travail* [online] 19 March. Available from: <https://prixromandentreprise.wordpress.com/2013/07/26/discours-du-ministre-du-travail/> [Accessed 09 October 2014].

⁹ Askolovitch, C. (2016) ‘Exquise barbarie (Fleur Pellerin et Modiano)’, *The Huffington Post* [online] 05 October. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/claude-askolovitch/fleur-pellerin-patrick-modiano_b_6052250.html?utm_hp_ref=france [Accessed 28 October 2014].

¹⁰ See Simonet-Tenant, F. (2004) *Le journal intime, genre littéraire et écriture ordinaire* (Paris: Editions Téraèdre).

They open an honest and legitimate debate on working conditions, statuses, and the impact of economic reforms, restructurings, politics and class.

1. Nailing the effects of globalisation in the post-68 era

Personal responsibility is, after all, for the workers and not for the capitalists.
(Harvey, D. (2009) *Organizing for the Anti-Capitalist Transition*).

The publication in 1973 of *Toyota, l'usine du désespoir* by journalist Kamata Satoshi,¹¹ hired for six months as a temp to work on an assembly line, gives a raw insight into the universe of a dehumanised factory at the avant-garde of globalisation. Repetitive tasks, production rate, exhaustion and safety breaches that lead to deadly accidents and alienation are on the frontline of the Toyotist working conditions. The insider works a minimum of eight hours a day, strictly applying the managerial doctrine of lean production and continuous improvement (kaizen) implemented through the Five S principles: Seiri (débarras), Seiton (rangement), Seiso (nettoyage), Seiketsu (ordre), Shitsuke (rigueur).¹² As Toyotism has since reached and been implemented in Western factories and the tertiary sector, the diary's resonance is even more significant four decades later. Translated in several languages, the text has been republished over 30 times, reaching up to 300,000 copies worldwide. It has become emblematic, especially for some trade unionists who have recently taken its republication as an opportunity to justify current disputes.¹³ In France, In *Les Linges de la nuit*, which sold a million copies in 1975, war correspondent, former member of the French Resistance and poet Madeleine Riffaud kept a diary of her experience as an auxiliary nurse in a Parisian hospital for several months. The text sheds light on the work degradation of personnel and how tasks are redistributed on a daily basis in an extremely pressurised environment. In a rigid hierarchical organisation dominated by proximity and a constant sense of emergency, enforced versatility becomes the norm due to staff shortages and creeping marketisation within the public sector. Thus, the auxiliary nurse's tasks overlap with those of the nurse, whose work overlaps with that

¹¹ Satoshi, K. (1973) *Toyota, l'usine du désespoir, (journal d'un ouvrier saisonnier)* (Paris: Les éditions ouvrières, collection Rencontre des peuples).

¹² Lamarre, A. (2014) 'Les 5S: la base de l'amélioration continue', *Logiguide CGL (volume 7/n° 2)* [online] Available from: <http://www.faq-logistique.com/GCL-Logiguide-Vol07Num02-5S-Amelioration-Continue.htm> [Accessed 13 October 2014].

¹³ Bonnet, S. (2008) 'Ch'tis: connaissez-vous le toyotisme?', *La Voix du Nord* [online] 06 April. Available from: <http://come4news.com/chtis-connaissiez-vous-le-toyotisme/> [Accessed 13 October 2014].

of the doctor in a factory-like and Toyotist-esque context. Riffaud meticulously reveals the day in, day out struggles of the underpaid hospital staff but also voices their aspirations, strong sense of responsibilities, relentlessness, harsh questioning and disillusion.¹⁴ In the light of recent events (institutionalised intimidation, bullying and suicide), the issues highlighted in the text bear unquestionable similarities to situations that occurred over 40 years ago.¹⁵

Published in 1978, Robert Linhart's *L'Etabli* is based on his post-1968 experience as a skilled worker in a Citroën factory.¹⁶ It has also been republished and translated into several languages. Akin to Satoshi's approach, Linhart's involvement was part of *le mouvement des établis* which consisted of placing a few hundred young Maoist intellectuals at the front of production lines in order to experience for themselves, observe and report on the daily life in a factory.¹⁷ In contrast, one of its most striking and evocative storylines is that of old fellow-worker Mr Demarcy.

When the top management of Citroën decides to replace his old workbench with a modernised one without consultation for reasons of rationalisation and exponential efficiency, Mr Demarcy, a conscientious, respected and competent operator, simply loses it and most importantly loses his professional pride on which his self had been intimately shaped through time and self-taught expertise. The following passage is particularly telling. The old workbench embodies decades of experience that don't carry much weight for the team of managers who, on the first day he has to start using the new standardised version of workbenches, pay him an unannounced visit as they want to observe and assess how it operates:

Tout l'atelier de soudure connaît bien Demarcy, sa précision, son expérience. Mais personne ne le dira. Personne ne dira rien. Le bureau des méthodes a toujours raison. [...] Penché, maladroit et incertain, sur un travail devenu brusquement étrange et redoutable. Avec toute cette bande autour de lui, comme s'ils faisaient passer un examen professionnel à un jeunot, à se pousser du coude, à prendre des mines scandalisées, à faire des remarques.¹⁸

One can infer that the old tool is the symbol of the industrial era (the end of the second age of capitalism which coincides with the first oil crisis in 1973) whereas the

¹⁴ Riffaud, M. (1975) *Les Lingés de la nuit* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance).

¹⁵ Neves, P. (2017) 'Georges-Pompidou: l'hôpital "le plus moderne" de France, symbole de la souffrance du personnel hospitalier', *Marianne* [online] 03 March. Available from: <https://www.marianne.net/societe/georges-pompidou-l-hopital-le-plus-moderne-de-france-symbole-de-la-souffrance-du-personnel> [Accessed 09 March 2017].

¹⁶ Linhart, R. (1978) *L'Etabli*, op. cit.

¹⁷ Veinstein, A. (2007) 'Les établis', *France Culture* [online] 16 January. Available from: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/surpris-par-la-nuit-08-09/les-etablis-13> [Accessed 29 November 2013].

¹⁸ Linhart, R. (1978) *L'Etabli*, op. cit., p. 74.

new one symbolises the emergence of neo-liberalism (the third age of capitalism).¹⁹ However, in the case of Mr Demarcy, his line manager wisely decides to reinstall the old workbench – at his discretion, which exemplifies some evidence of residual resistance among middle management – after realising that the old worker’s productivity has decreased since he was forced to use the new ‘alien’ device. The romantic vision of a reunion prevails as they both formed one single identity. The man and the tool have become indivisible, something else, complementary and have lived in perfect harmony for decades. Yet the damage is irreversible:

Le vieux reprit ses retouches sur son vieil établi, apparemment comme par le passé. Mais il y avait à présent dans ses yeux une sorte de frayeur que je ne lui connaissais pas auparavant. Il paraissait se sentir épié. En sursis, comme s’il attendait le prochain coup. Il se refermait encore plus sur lui-même, toujours inquiet quand on lui adressait la parole. Parfois, il loupait une portière, ce qui ne lui était presque jamais arrivé “avant”. Peu après, il tomba malade.²⁰

The sudden replacement of the old workbench also functions as a representative parable in which workers end up being overlooked and chopped from their long-acquired expertise by a snap of the fingers. Furthermore, when all the systems of defence are exhausted or inoperative, one of the only ways out left is illness, whatever form it may take. As Marie-France Hirigoyen observes: ‘Dans le monde du travail, entre l’ultraperformance et la maladie, il n’y a rien’.²¹ One of the first ‘reported’ victims of globalised capitalism in French literature, the emblematic operator is left with an indelible sense of apprehension following the drastic experience of abrupt change that had completely ignored the consequences that such a blow would inflict on his identity and, by extension, on the social class he belongs to, in part victimised by a lack of political consciousness. As Sonya Florey writes: ‘Ainsi, *L’Etabli* décrit l’usine comme un milieu aliénant. Les contraintes de l’activité industrielle affectent le physique et le mental de l’ouvrier et questionnent sa condition.’²² Thus, as it is highlighted in the autobiographical text, separating individuals from their collective is a tactic that bears fruit. The May 68 strikes are still fresh in the employers’ minds. The isolation from a collective leaves each blacklisted worker at the mercy of arbitrary decisions that have the potential to put them in a position of vulnerability, therefore subjected to all forms of intimidation and control as illustrated below:

¹⁹ See footnote n° 34 of Chapter One on page 18 in which the different ages of capitalism are outlined.

²⁰ Linhart, R. (1978) *L’Etabli*, op. cit., p. 75.

²¹ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 234.

²² Florey, S. (2013) *L’engagement littéraire à l’ère néolibérale* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion), p. 78.

L'après-midi, Junot continue. Convocation. Savon. "Pouvez disposer." Sa méthode est simple et efficace. Il faut que chaque gréviste se sente individuellement repéré, visé. L'arracher à la relative protection de l'action collective, au cours de laquelle il peut se croire fondu dans la masse, presque anonyme. Qu'il entende prononcer son nom. Qu'il l'aperçoive entouré de rouge sur la liste que tient Junot. Qu'il sente ne serait-ce qu'un instant toute la machine Citroën peser sur lui seul, entre les quatre murs de ce bureau nu, métallique, résonnant du vacarme des chaînes voisines.²³

In the wake of the May 1968 outcome, *L'Etabli* therefore epitomises a disoriented social class which has since been increasingly subjected to victimisation and miserabilist representations, and is the orphan of the grand narrative that empowered it for decades. On the other hand, scrupulously reporting the details of the aftermath may be the first step towards acknowledging it and finding ways to move on.

Away from hospitals and production lines, and swapping the diary genre for the detective one, one may consider the bestseller *L'Imprécauteur* by René-Victor Pilhes to be a milestone of the genre. It is the first post-Second World War French '*roman d'entreprise*' before the designation existed. Its central plot is set at the heart of the top management of American multinational Roserys & Mitchell Head Office in Paris.²⁴ First published in 1974, it was awarded *le prix Femina* and 400,000 copies were sold in the same year. It has been translated into 22 languages since its publication. The spy novel is set right at the end of the post-war economic boom with a direct reference to the first oil crisis as the story unfolds. It offers the perspective of a global economy controlled by a handful of multinationals, pulling the strings of puppet governments reduced to staging their legitimacy through PR stunts and with limited margins of manoeuvre in order to preserve any remaining sense of credibility vis-à-vis their respective electorates.

The accidental death of a promising executive that triggers a power struggle among his peers occurs at the same time as the mysterious appearance of a growing crack that literally threatens the foundation of the Paris head office building. Merging plots and twists with a clear and disturbing 'pre-vision' of the new world order that is about to emerge, *L'Imprécauteur*, like the previous texts, sets the tone *avant la lettre* for an accurate account of what will be known as globalisation in years to come. The failures of the leftist grand ideals are acknowledged and anticipated as the hegemony of a radical and unbridled managerial Economism at the same time as a deceitful global pacification gains momentum. Its tour de force projects the readers of the 1970s into today's world and backwards, an era somewhat impervious to any large-

²³ Linhart, R. (1978) *L'Etabli*, op. cit., p. 107.

²⁴ Pilhes, R-V. (1974) *L'Imprécauteur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

scale revolution and dominated by a neo-liberal consensus in synch with hegemonic centre-right policies facilitated by managerial control. The following excerpt encapsulates the zeitgeist of the transformations in process:

Le management consiste à dépouiller le plus possible les plans, les chiffres, les organisations, les transactions, en somme toutes les décisions imaginables, de leurs facteurs émotionnels. [...] le management exige le neutralisme le plus absolu, un non-engagement radical. Le problème est de savoir si une entreprise est rentable ou pas, si elle peut s'autofinancer ou non. Peu importe que les dirigeants se déclarent ensuite de droite ou de gauche. Il s'ensuit un nivellement général des comportements et des idées. Les antagonismes politiques cèdent le pas à la circulation pacifique des capitaux et des marchandises, ce qui, forcément, ne peut conduire qu'à l'harmonie et la fraternité mondiale.²⁵

Yet what comes to light from the narrator's retrospective account is that powerful companies are in reality akin to those idols with feet of clay in which a single individual's master plan can jam the system. A prime example of *littérature du lanceur d'alerte*, the text is an apology for powerful whistleblowing and, on this particular point, prefigures François Emmanuel's *La Question humaine* written over 20 years later.²⁶ It also shares analogies with some aspects of the theory developed by scientist Jared Diamond. Jeopardising a specific fragment is bound to have devastating repercussions on the entire edifice.²⁷ A single whistleblower turned mastermind still has the potency to shake the whole system by targeting one of its components, reinforcing the intrinsic acknowledgement that the global interconnection is nonetheless built like a sand castle.²⁸ Using the Montparnasse Tower as the head office of the MNC and tapping into the horror genre, the novel was adapted for the cinema in 1976 by Jean-Louis Bertuccelli.²⁹

Critical writings in relation to the workplace can also be found in the 1980s, a period characterised by heavy defeat for the working class and the unions. Yet, even during a decade dominated by crony capitalism, the liberalisation of capital movements and political disengagement were reflected in *cinéma du look* (see previous chapter); writings outlining forms of resistance were received with a slow burning impact. Such an impact has not triggered a collective political movement or a revolution as yet. However, would May 68 have happened without the Existentialists

²⁵ Pilhes, R-V. (1974) *L'Imprécauteur*, op. cit., p. 37.

²⁶ Emmanuel, F. (2000) *La Question humaine*, op. cit.

²⁷ Diamond, J. (2005) *Collapse, How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York & London: Viking/Allen Lane).

²⁸ A series of anonymous scrolls – by way of detailed tracts – are sent by a poison-pen-letter writer, and their hermetic content about economy, power, money and designated top managers sparks panic among the executives. Those encrypted or perhaps bogus messages find a way to reach each member of staff with unforeseen effects on the way they may react as a collective.

²⁹ *L'Imprécauteur* (1977) Directed by Jean-Louis Bertuccelli [Film]. France: PARAFRANCE Films.

and New Wave Cinema? Some ‘literary whistleblowers’ began to use aesthetic codes and a wider range of genres to explore the workplace whilst preserving the centrality of politics. For instance, in *L’excès-l’usine* Leslie Kaplan explores the consequences of mass industrialisation in a huge factory that shares similarities with a penitentiary, from which no escape is possible for the workers. The poetic style utilised by the author breaks with other post-May 1968 ethnographic texts based on the same thematics. Poetry is used as an effective medium to reveal the daily and harsh world of labour and the workers’ absurd tasks. It voices the swallowing and erasure of the human beings by machines.³⁰ In his first novel *Sortie d’usine* (1982), ‘full-time whistleblower’ François Bon also examines the daily activities of a factory, over a period of four weeks. He excels at building a bridge between fiction and *littérature du réel*. All the different forms of ‘exit’ are tackled: the long and agonising daily journeys on public transport, the accident on the assembly line, the strike, the retirement, the drafted letter of resignation never handed in and death as the ultimate way out. The text is followed by others, *Temps machine* (1993), *Mécanique* (2001) and *Daewoo* (2004), which is explored further below. Bon’s *Sortie d’usine* was also republished for its 30th anniversary.³¹

Identical thematics, archetypal characters and real workers drawn from the eclecticism of the prolific literary publications continue to flourish. The 1990s consolidate the trend with controversial writer Michel Houellebecq, who explores the consequences of neo-liberalism for the individual deprived of any depth or worthwhile intimacy in the seminal texts *Extension du domaine de la lutte* and *Les Particules élémentaires*.³² Referring to the latter, Houellebecq cynically stated that the May 1968 student revolt and the flower power movement of the 1960s created the ‘serial killers of the 1990s’.³³ The *roman du tertiaire* is born, in which resistance is merely presented as a vestige of the past. Both bestsellers were adapted for theatre and cinema.³⁴ In the aforementioned *La Question humaine*,³⁵ adapted for cinema by

³⁰ Kaplan, L. (1982) *L’excès-l’usine* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

³¹ Bon, F. (1982) *Sortie d’usine* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit).

³² Houellebecq, M. (1994) *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (Paris: Editions Flammarion); (1998) *Les Particules élémentaires* (Paris: Editions Flammarion).

³³ Willsher, K. (2014) ‘Michel Houellebecq provokes France with story of Muslim president’, *The Guardian* [online] 16 December. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/16/michel-houellebecq-france-submission-soumission-muslim-islam-president> [Accessed 19 December 2014].

³⁴ *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (1999) Directed by Philippe Harel [Film]. France: Mars Distribution ; *Elementarteilchen* (2006) Directed by Oskar Roehler [Film]. France: TFM Distribution.

Nicolas Klotz in 2007, and explored in Section Three of Chapter Three, François Emmanuel gives the genre an even more powerful aestheticism linked to the cold and clinical storyline taking place in a sterilised universe. The dehumanised characters embrace the automation and alienation of global capitalism as if it were here ‘to last for 1000 years’.³⁶

The articulation between cultural production and political movements is neither systematic nor spontaneous. Its unpredictable occurrence is subjected to all sorts of socio-historical contingencies and is in many instances measured retrospectively. The impact of the Enlightenment on the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 is a prime example of such an elusive and slow burning process. During that period, the country had experienced a series of bad harvests following consecutive harsh winters and the price of bread had rocketed, which led to widespread starvation. Thus, the Enlightenment did not directly trigger the revolution but might have acted as a lightning rod to its unravelling insofar as ‘[...] l’ensemble des œuvres du XVIIIème qui ont parcouru le siècle ont proposé une critique radicale des inégalités, des fanatismes, des injustices, et ont contribué intellectuellement au mouvement révolutionnaire.’³⁷ More recently, Friðrika Tómasdóttir observes that ‘Marx et Engels écrivent leur *Manifeste du parti communiste* en 1848 (Marx, Engels, 1848), plus de cent ans avant les émeutes étudiantes de 1968 qui demandent une nouvelle structure sociale, sans classes.’³⁸ If one cannot deny that such a circumstantial combination of events may only come down to a fluke, it is nonetheless intriguing that other flukes of a similar nature have marked and transformed a given society throughout history, e.g. the role played by Constructivism before and during the Russian Revolution of 1917.³⁹ In addition, the articulation between cultural forms and political movements works both ways. If French New Wave films such as Jean-Luc Godard’s *A bout de*

³⁵ Emmanuel, F. (2000) *La Question humaine*, op. cit.

³⁶ *La langue ne ment pas* (2003) Directed by Stan Neumann [Documentary Film] op. cit.

³⁷ ‘Les Philosophes et la Révolution française’, *BiblioLettres* [online] no date. Available from: http://www.bibliollettres.com/w/pages/page.php?id_page=252 [Accessed 06 March 2018].

³⁸ Tómasdóttir, F. (2009) ‘Mai 68 et le cinéma. Le vent de liberté souffle sur le septième Art’ [online] Sigillum Universitatis Islandiae. Available from: https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/2376/1/2_fixed.pdf [Accessed 17 March 2018], p. 24.

³⁹ See Hatherley, O. (2011) ‘The constructivists and the Russian revolution in art and architecture’, *The Guardian* [online] 04 November. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/04/russian-avant-garde-constructivists> [Accessed 23 March 2018].

*souffle*⁴⁰ inspired the ideals of May 68,⁴¹ Tómasdóttir writes that '[p]endant les émeutes d'étudiants en 1968, le cinéma connaît aussi des changements structuraux. L'affaire de la Cinémathèque⁴² et la formation d'états généraux du cinéma au début de l'année 68 mettent en exergue une bataille contre le pouvoir, et la situation dans les rues marque la production des films. Le style devient plus « télévisé » et plus documentaire qu'avant et les réalisateurs prennent la liberté de créer des œuvres qui reflètent l'état d'esprit dans le pays.'⁴³ By contrast, in *L'Irrévolution* by Pascal Lainé published in 1971, the narrator's post-May 68 blues is only matched by the political disengagement of his disenfranchised pupils.⁴⁴ His reflection mixed with guilt following the defeat of collective action is palpable through his sterile existential vexation and disenchantment, giving way to a rather grim vision of human society that can be situated at the intersection between Jacques Généreux's *La dissociété*⁴⁵ published thirty years later and Jean-Paul Sartre's main character Antoine Roquentin in *La Nausée* published in 1938.⁴⁶ With a pinch of romantic morosity, and despite the social and cultural asymmetries, *L'Irrévolution* also shares similarities with François-René de Chateaubriand's *René* (1802),⁴⁷ in which the protagonist finds himself completely at odds with the post-revolutionary French society of his time.⁴⁸ In Lainé's autobiographical novel, the Parisian and middle class highly-qualified philosophy teacher who starts his career in a technical college in the suburb of Rouen laments:

Je voulais connaître le « monde du travail ». Quel orgueil! J'ai découvert tout simplement le travail, ces morceaux de soi qu'on donne en lambeaux contre le droit de vivre.⁴⁹ [...] C'est cela mon mal; et peut-être, comme on dit, le "mal du siècle"; C'est l'*irrévolution*: c'est le mouvement contradictoire d'une inquiétude et d'une critique si profondes, si totales peut-être, qu'elles-mêmes

⁴⁰ *A bout de souffle* (1960) Directed by Jean-Luc Godard [Film]. France: Imperia Films & Les Productions Georges de Beauregard.

⁴¹ Bergan, R. (2008) 'Godard, the embodiment of the spirit of May 68', *The Guardian* [online] 12 May. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2008/may/12/godardtheembodimentofthes> [Accessed 11 April 2018].

⁴² The sacking of Henri Langlois, founder and director of the Cinémathèque Française by the then Minister of Culture André Malraux in February 1968 may have been one of the catalysts of the movement even though Langlois was reinstated following a string of protests. The organisation is considered one of the most prestigious film archives in the world.

⁴³ Tómasdóttir, F. (2009) '*Mai 68 et le cinéma. Le vent de liberté souffle sur le septième Art*' [online] Sigillum Universitatis Islandiae. Available from: https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/2376/1/2_fixed.pdf [Accessed 17 March 2018], see abstract.

⁴⁴ Lainé, P. (1971) *L'Irrévolution* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

⁴⁵ Généreux, J. (2011) *La dissociété*, op.cit.

⁴⁶ Sartre, J-P (1938) *La Nausée* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

⁴⁷ Chateaubriand, F-R de (1802) *René* (Paris: Livre de Poche).

⁴⁸ Viscount François-René de Chateaubriand, who was born three years after the French Revolution, resisted its social upheavals by taking refuge in the Romantic artistic movement (1800-1850).

⁴⁹ Lainé, P. (1971) *L'Irrévolution*, op. cit., p. 104.

n'échappent pas à leur propre acide, et qu'elles se dissolvent dans leur réflexion sur elles-mêmes, qu'elles s'effacent.'⁵⁰

Representative of the paradoxes inherent in his generation and class, the character uncompromisingly outlines how social ineffectiveness became normative in post-68 France whilst foreshadowing the Houellebecquian archetypes of the 1990s and the 2000s.

On the other hand, social effectiveness can derive from a direct articulation with cultural forms which have the power to become a driving force for change. François Ruffin's *Merci patron!* and Anna Sam's *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* are two prime examples of such a phenomenon.⁵¹ The release of *Merci patron!* in February 2016 coincided with François Hollande's government plan to reform the labour law in order to make redundancies easier, which triggered mass street protests. Despite little marketing, such timing might explain the success of the documentary that was seen by more than 260,000 people in over 800 cinemas. An open-air screening attended by hundreds of protesters was also organised in Place de la République in Paris and the film's sarcastic title song⁵² spontaneously became a rallying cry for *Nuit debout* (see Section Three of Chapter Two), which perfectly exemplifies the convergence between a social movement and a cultural form.

Regarding Anna Sam's novel, social effectiveness resulted from her bringing to light specific forms of exploitation in the tertiary sector which, however rife, were either underestimated or simply overlooked. One of these insidious forms is that 'ce qui caractérise l'économie de services, dont la caissière est un exemple-type, c'est précisément le poids croissant du client: si les contraintes viennent de lui et non plus de la direction, comment s'y opposer?'⁵³ Interestingly, the book's immediate impact was to change the reader's perception of the person behind the till with whom they frequently come into contact. With an abundance of facts underlying the consequences of deunionisation, crippling automation and that of the frequency of RSI among staff,⁵⁴ the pedagogical awareness that emerges from the success of *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (half a million copies sold by 2011) have also been

⁵⁰ Lainé, P. (1971) *L'Irrévolution*, op. cit., p. 142.

⁵¹ *Merci patron!* (2016) Directed by François Ruffin [Documentary Film] op. cit.; Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière*, op. cit.

⁵² *Merci Patron* (1971) was a hit song written and performed by Les Charlots, a popular comedy group in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

⁵³ Kaufer, I. (2010) 'Quand les caissières encaissent', *Politique* [online] 03 June. Available from: <http://www.revuepolitique.be/quand-les-caissieres-encaissent/> [Accessed 11 April 2018].

⁵⁴ Repetitive Strain Injury.

amplified by several sociological essays published in the years that followed, e.g. Sophie Bernard's *Travail et automatisation des services. La fin des caissières?*⁵⁵ Last but not least, the novel triggered a wave of walkouts and the author has since become a symbol for *le prolétariat féminisé* (see Section Four of this chapter).⁵⁶

In considering the analogies in terms of genre used by Ruffin and Sam, one may wonder whether humour, satire and derision hold the key for a swift and successful translation into social effectiveness. They do. Comedy, to paraphrase Hegel, outsmarts tragedy in terms of scope and impact.⁵⁷ However, this assumption might be partially true given that Jean-Paul Lilienfeld's tragic *La Journée de la jupe* also triggered micro social movements in different schools throughout the country (see Section Two of Chapter Three). So all in all, a film or a text may simply come out at the right time and may well prove to be the straw that breaks the camel's back, therefore inspiring and/or triggering a social movement that could not have previously emerged because existing political and social organisations were not in tune to bring it to life.

Besides, one observes that unmeasurable effectiveness tends to characterise most of the writings and films explored in this thesis with potential social realisations still yet to be seen, which makes social effectiveness proteiform. For instance, Kamata Satoshi's *Toyota, l'usine du désespoir* published in 1973 was used as a reference to justify and inspire a recent workplace dispute, as outlined in this section. As for Gérard Mordillat's novels *Les Vivants et les Morts* (2004) and *Notre part des ténèbres* (2008), two texts explored in Section Four, the centrality of class rehabilitation through inspirational characters might contribute towards class empowerment, which would eventually have a peripheral or central impact on social movements to emerge in a not too distant future.

The following section focuses on four writings outlining the ideological transformation within companies through class tensions and augmented competitiveness in a context characterised by a 'gentle toyotisation' and the decline of politics that has resulted in the emergence of a *dissociété* (in reference to Jean-Pierre Le Goff's *La barbarie douce* (1999) and Jacques Généreux's *La dissociété* (2006)

⁵⁵ Bernard, S. (2012) *Travail et automatisation des services. La fin des caissières?* op. cit.

⁵⁶ Deslandes, M. (2008) 'La colère des caissières de supermarché', *Le Parisien* [online] 18 February. Available from: <http://www.leparisien.fr/une/la-colere-des-caissieres-de-supermarche-18-02-2008-3296065526.php> [Accessed 14 December 2014].

⁵⁷ In Marx, K. (1862) 'Comments on the North American Events', *Die Presse* [online] 07 October. Available from: <http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1862/10/12.html> [Accessed 06 September 2017].

respectively). Le Goff's essay explores and criticises the new modes of management that theorise and fragment working practices legitimised by the use of a slippery and technical jargon that the centre-left has embraced. G  n  reux posits that the atomisation of communities driven by a destructive competition induced by neo-liberalism is a threat to democracy. This set of critical analyses, based on how globalisation has negatively impacted the workplace and its players, has been taken on board and amplified by novelists who have, in turn, voiced stark warnings in their works about the domination of global neo-liberalism.

2. The gentle toyotisation of the character in the business novel

On dirait que, philosophe ou non, vient toujours un moment o   l'on est exactement ce qu'on d  nonce.

(Laurens, C. (2016) 'Faites ce que je dis, ne faites pas ce que je fais.' *Lib  ration*, 22 April).

A sound example of 'gentle toyotisation' combined with the creeping emergence of *dissoci  t  * can be found in Fran  ois Salvaing's *La Bo  te*, which outlines the intricacy between champagne socialism and neo-liberalism during the Mitterrand years.⁵⁸ If main character and modernist technocrat Patrick Bardeilhan celebrates the victory of the left in May 1981, wears a badge in support of *Solidarno   * and will continue to be a fervent reader of left-leaning *Lib  ration* newspaper, his career reputation is nevertheless built on laying off staff with an unquestionably skilful determination and panache. The awkward context – the first socialist elected president of the Fifth Republic giving way to neo-liberalism just two years after his landmark election and the paradoxical and ideological complications that followed – is covered with specific socio-linguistic encoding in order to duck the 'conversion', as encapsulated in the following excerpt:

Que se passait-il au sommet de l'Etat? Lors d'un voyage dans la r  gion Midi-Pyr  n  es, le pr  sident de la R  publique venait de prononcer le mot profit sans le mettre au pluriel et au p  joratif comme dans la tradition marxiste. C'  tait un signe, peut-  tre un signal. [...] Son ancien disciple Bondue lui expliqua:

- Personne n'a int  r  t    souligner cette conversion. Ni ceux qui sont pour: ils craignent, en la c  l  brant trop t  t, de l'entraver; ni ceux qui sont contre: ils esp  rent, en ne la relevant pas, la gommer.⁵⁹

Bardeilhan, an archetypical everyman of the ideological shift of the 1980s, personifies a generation of repentant leftists who pander to managerial and economic orthodoxy. Thus, his expertise is supported by a persuasive and slippery discourse that

⁵⁸ Salvaing, F. (1998) *La Bo  te*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

allows him to operate by banking on the deterioration of social protests and nipping any potential conflict in the bud. Such a discourse is used to manage the splits between neo-liberalism and social justice to do the trick (see Section Two of Chapter One). Blairist before the Blair era,⁶⁰ he goes from rags to riches to turn his *modus operandi* into a landmark in the realm of HR whilst claiming that the workers' interests are still his top priority and are perfectly compatible with deregulation and lean production:

Décloisonner, maître mot. La gestion des ressources humaines devait être l'affaire de tous. Il énumérait les objectifs à poursuivre. Et à réunir. Cinq, comme les doigts de la main de demain. Personnalisation. Adaptation. Mobilisation. Partage. Anticipation. P-A-M-P-A. Présenté comme ça, on l'assurait qu'on retiendrait. Un type très agréable, tonique.⁶¹

Thus, the complexity of the processes of neo-liberalism as well as the painful consequences related to restructurings are reduced to a single and ludicrous acronym: P-A-M-P-A, which one imagines is the result of an advertising agency brainstorming.⁶² Based on the postulate that class struggles have become irrelevant and anachronistic, the executive justifies his questionable methods by setting up and promoting an improbable new ideological system which propagates '[...] des schémas, des formules simples, des messages stéréotypés de rationalisation que les travailleurs s'approprient pour éviter de porter eux-mêmes les contradictions et qui remplacent progressivement les débats d'opinions [...]'.⁶³ Russell Jacoby writes: 'Yet the retreat is presented as an astounding advance.'⁶⁴

Interestingly, there is a hybrid narrative combining 'new wave cinema' and 'continuous reporting' that is reflected in the accelerating pace of the story. As if equipped with a handheld camera, the narrator gives the impression that keeping up with the protagonist who is permanently in a hurry is almost an impossible task to achieve. The same can apply to key characters from other novels' mentioned later in this chapter, e.g. CEO Marc Tourneuilierie (Osmont, 2004) and consultant Alexandre

⁶⁰ 'The character of this changing world is indifferent to tradition, unforgiving of frailty. No respecter of past reputations. It has no custom and practice. It is replete with opportunities, but they only go to those swift to adapt, slow to complain, open, willing and able to change.' (Future PM Tony Blair's words during a speech at the Labour Party's Annual Conference in 2005).

⁶¹ Salvaing, F. (1998) *La Boîte*, op. cit., p. 27.

⁶² As an irrefutable manifestation of a misappropriated artistic critique, it echoes the SBAM (sourire bonjour au revoir et merci) that defines the cashiers' set of tasks (see Section One of Chapter One) as also described in Anna Sam's *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (see Section Four).

⁶³ Huez, D. (2008) *Souffrir au travail, comprendre pour agir*, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶⁴ Jacoby, R. (1999) *The End of Utopia, Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*, op. cit., p. 47.

Guyot (Mourad, 2006). Intoxicated by neo-liberalism, they consume its ideology like a course of steroids.

Bardeilhan is a convoluted individual. As Sonya Florey writes: ‘Le personnage se leurre: il pense perpétuer l’œuvre éducative de ses parents⁶⁵ et croit possible la collaboration entre des entreprises avides d’un rayonnement international et un Etat surplombant, rassurant et nationaliste.’⁶⁶ He presents himself as a man of proximity with practical experience in showing some respect for the workers’ skills. He is approachable and keen to visit production lines to casually chat to employees, regardless of their positions. The certainty that the latter have been socially demoted following the economic transformations in process that he has implemented finds its justification in his numerous U-turns, hence promoting a simplistic vision of a society torn between reformers and conservatives:

L’emploi, l’emploi! Bien sûr, l’emploi! Mais les suppressions de postes étaient le prix à payer pour la mutation, un péage et ensuite s’ouvrirait l’autoroute, modernité, compétitivité, avec, à l’horizon, de nouveaux emplois. Il sent sa pomme d’Adam sauter, saillir, convaincre, comme aux plus beaux jours de 81. Sept ans pour changer de peau et s’y trouver bien, rien que de normal.⁶⁷

Only a minority of union representatives appear to be able to read between the lines and see what the reformist’s agenda really is: to sabotage social advances. These militants somehow live on borrowed time:

Parmi les délégués il y eut des irréductibles, ils ne se voyaient pas discuter primes de départ, reclassements, le syndicalisme pour eux avait toujours été avancées, conquêtes. [...] Patrick Bardeilhan était davantage pour les – il chercha ses mots – impliquer. Qu’ils fassent partie des rescapés témoignerait de la volonté de dialogue de La Boîte, et en même temps montrerait qu’il n’existait pas d’alternative à ses choix, que tout le monde, et jusqu’aux militants les plus intraitables, finissait par s’incliner devant la Nouvelle Donne.⁶⁸

However, ‘Bardeilhan-ism’ appears too good to be true. The irrelevancy of his communication skills is exposed in broad daylight when he makes significant faux-pas.⁶⁹ This reaches a tragic climax when he is kidnapped by a 12-year-old boy whose father had been laid off and whose only demand is to reinstate him in his post, followed by the tragic outcome of the boy shooting himself live on TV. This is the last straw with which the main character will never come to terms. Bardeilhan’s yacht is found drifting at sea with no one on board. Either suicide or accident, the story ends

⁶⁵ Both parents work in *la fonction publique* as teachers.

⁶⁶ Florey, S. (2013) *L’engagement littéraire à l’ère néolibérale*, op. cit., p. 83.

⁶⁷ Salvaing, F. (1998) *La Boîte*, op. cit., p. 194.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

⁶⁹ Bardeilhan shares his concern for the absence of two employees he presumes are off sick, forgetting he made them redundant a few months earlier. Furthermore, witnessing an accident that could have had fatal consequences on one of the production lines sows confusion in his mind as he struggles to admit that it might have happened as the direct consequence of the staff reduction that he had enforced.

there, strangely echoing a maritime metaphor he had utilised to justify his long-term mission of reforming the place of work during his heyday:

- Ici, vous n'êtes plus rien, monsieur.

Il [Bardeilhan] n'avait même pas regardé sa phrase atteindre l'autre, il était revenu à l'enjeu principal, pas de négociations mais, volontiers, discussions. De toute manière, négocier quoi? Ou le navire s'allégeait, ou il sombrait. Ni leur faute ni la sienne. Ou bien l'on cherchait ensemble les ports les plus secourables ou débarquer les matelots en surnombre, ou bien, faute de s'entendre assez vite, il faudrait les abandonner en pleine mer.⁷⁰

Having fallen from his hubris, retribution finally hits the 'Dorian Gray of management'. His disappearance symbolically spells the end of the consensual yet coercive ideology he had embraced and perpetuated with conviction. In Salvaing's own words: 'Quand j'ai fini le livre, je me suis rendu compte que j'avais fait une métaphore de la vie de Pierre Bérégovoy.⁷¹ Comme lui, Bardeilhan vient d'une famille modeste et est animé par des idées sincères. Mais il va s'éloigner de ce qu'il avait envie de faire. Et cet éloignement, ce reniement, il le fera avec une réelle bonne conscience. Jusqu'au point où il va exploser.'⁷²

As in the previous text, Laurent Quintreau's *Marge Brute* takes the reader right to the heart of a situation of gentle barbarism and hyper-individualism. The narrative confinement of each voice expresses a solitary and long angst within a Dantesque triptych (*l'enfer, le purgatoire, le paradis*).⁷³ The voyeuristic reader is plunged into a state of intimacy with each of the eleven executives in a banal two-hour strategic meeting, revealing a linear and uninterrupted flow of unprocessed thoughts and emotions. As no specific location and no company name are mentioned, the meeting encapsulates the everywhere-ness of globalisation. The style is standardised: each monologue is delivered in the first person and within a single sentence with no beginning and no end. Punctuation is kept to a minimum. A basic transcript is momentarily probed and retransmitted as such – so we are to believe – by the universality of the narrative process characterised with total indifference, which underlines the influence of the French New Novel genre of the 1950s with regard to experimental narrative techniques.

⁷⁰ Salvaing, F. (1998) *La Boîte*, op. cit., p. 127.

⁷¹ Pierre Bérégovoy served as a socialist Prime Minister from 1992 to 1993 during François Mitterrand's second presidency. Taking full responsibility for the legislative elections debacle in March 1993 and embroiled in a financial scandal, he committed suicide in May of the same year.

⁷² Guichard, T. (1999) 'La Boîte', *Le Matricule des Anges* n° 025 [online interview] January-February. Available from: http://www.lmda.net/din/tit_lmda.php?Id=6714 [Accessed 05 May 2015].

⁷³ Quintreau, L. (2006) *Marge Brute* (Paris: Editions Denoël).

In *l'enfer*, the meeting is not what it seems. On the surface, everything appears to be civilised and professional. However, scheming thoughts unfold in the back of the characters' minds. From long-term career plans to unconfessed hatred and contempt for their colleagues, repressed and merciless infighting leaves every participant at each other's throats. The endless tirades thus capture one by one their political chaos. Access is given to violent thoughts, sexual desires, plotting, perverse domination, and ephemeral flashbacks, unlocking deep insights into their private selves.

Behind the corporate predator and sociopath persona feared by his subalterns exists a defenceless and enslaved Rorty, totally enthralled, and at the mercy of a certain Fischer who represents the shareholders in this implicit but implacable pseudo-Darwinistic game that defines global neo-liberalism. In addition, sycophant Arnaud de Vals laments about Rorty's good health so that he can take his position. In his own thoughts: '[...] l'entreprise de demain sera dure, parfaite et implacable, les faibles, les moches, les gros, les vieux, les lents et les idiots n'auront aucune chance d'y survivre [...]',⁷⁴ a eugenic vision which matches that of vainglorious protagonist CEO Marc Tourneuil in *Le Capital* (Osmont, 2004) examined in Section Three of this chapter.

Akin to a symbolic transposition of Agatha Christie's crime fiction *And Then There Were None* (1939) in today's corporate and brutal place of work, the archetypal executives are put together to face their demons: resentment and excessive competition for most of them. Richard Stoeffer fantasises about the different ways in which he could harm or even murder de Vals and Rorty; his thoughts turn into violent urges as they both start to get under his skin. Yet acknowledging that there is a reserve army of managers eager to experience their baptism of fire by stepping in is what prevents him from taking action:

[...] de Vals me fixe, qu'est-ce qu'il a à me regarder comme ça, tête de pintadeau, petite ordure à la gloire de Rorty, retenez-moi ou je lui saute à la gorge, je me vois déjà en train de lui exploser la trachée artère, seul problème, si on le supprimait il y en aurait cent autres, mille autres, aussi dynamiques, dévoués, proactifs, aussi parfaits que le contenu d'une petite annonce de recrutement dans un journal de cadres [...].⁷⁵

In *le purgatoire*, emotional detachment and critical pragmatism characterise Roussel's defence mechanisms in connection with his peers, his boss and the business world. By keeping a cool head, he manages to hold at bay any entrapment resulting

⁷⁴ Quintreau, L. (2006) *Marge Brute*, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

from fear, dependency or hatred. He considers his current job to be a provisional springboard to better tomorrows. Yet the character's desire to pull out remains a private matter and nothing else. He shows a certain degree of lucidity concerning the place of work but has no intention of challenging the corporate status quo, if only by seeking alliances with some of his peers. His hope that the system will collapse sometime is merely wishful thinking, which makes him an objective perpetrator of it:

[...] et ce Rorty qui continue de parler, son discours me fatigue, je ne l'écoute plus, je n'ai plus envie de l'écouter, un homme électrisé par la furieuse envie de dominer les autres reproduit et scénarise à l'infini ses misérables fantasmes de toute puissance devant d'autres hommes qui n'ont qu'une seule envie, être à sa place, voilà comment le système tient encore debout, quand va-t-il s'effondrer, va-t-il s'effondrer un jour [...].⁷⁶

He personifies the silent majority of real-world executives who continue to play the game whilst keeping a critical distance from the system's values and its grand discourses of self-justification.

If freeing oneself from the yoke of the company can only occur by means of an individualistic commitment and nothing else, so can salvation in the case of Alighieri's monologue in *le paradis*. As it happens, the experience of having come very close to death at gunpoint has put ultralucid Alighieri into a state of quasi-mystic and rather absurd rapture that completely defeats the *raison d'être* of his peers' secret agendas.⁷⁷ The character is perhaps the textual, poetic and 'memento mori',⁷⁸ avatar of Quintreau and they both travel through a 21st-century version of hell as did 14th-century poet Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy* completed in 1320. He embodies the writer's own diegetic projection, using him as an insider to faithfully report the unsaid slaughter within the corporate realm where 'all is vanity'.⁷⁹ The unconditional and absurdist love that he feels for every executive has no precedent and is inversely symmetrical to the deep hatred that dominates the group dynamics. In his own words:

[...] je voudrais tant les embrasser, les câliner, prendre un revolver pour viser leur tête et viser juste à côté, qu'ils comprennent que rien n'est grave, que nous sommes des êtres de passage, si fluides, si légers, hier encore je ne cessais de me lamenter, de m'inquiéter, ma séparation, mes prospects, ma place dans l'organigramme futur de la société [...] la perte du budget AHG aurait affecté la confiance que Rorty était prêt à m'accorder, une grande charrette se préparerait dont je ferais partie, tout cela me paraît si lointain, si dérisoire face à l'incommensurable pouvoir de l'instant [...].⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Quintreau, L. (2006) *Marge Brute*, op. cit., p. 110.

⁷⁷ Italian poet Dante's family name (1285-1321).

⁷⁸ "Remember that you must die" (translated from Latin).

⁷⁹ The Bible (Ecclesiastes 1), *Biblegateway.com* [online] Available from: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+1&version=ESV> [Accessed 12 February 2015].

⁸⁰ Quintreau, L. (2006) *Marge Brute*, op. cit., p. 119.

Might he have been subjected to a severe mental breakdown triggered by his aggression? Totally amused and unfazed by the human comedy in which he paradoxically participates, Alighieri's attitude represents an effective mechanism of defence against 'gentle barbarism'. However, to have been touched by some sort of holy grace does not make any difference at all given that he gets away from any sense of responsibility hence following the same path as his colleagues. The absurdity of the workplace matches that of the meaning of life. The ending is basically a mere unplugging; an anticlimax. The narration is abruptly aborted, impeding any return of the repressed. Without warning, the reader is simply left to his own subjectivity.

Is there any social significance in reporting scrupulously the 'toyotised' minds of the characters? This reflects the writer's paradox. In Quintreau's own words: 'Le paradis est un paradis réactionnel, momentané. Ce sont certains éléments qui ont poussé Alighieri dedans. Le purgatoire, c'est l'esprit critique, c'est une place plus adaptable au monde. Le paradis n'est pas dans la distance. Le purgatoire, c'est l'espace de la négociation, on négocie son salut. En cela, il est proche de l'activité syndicale.'⁸¹ Considered either way, the impact may remain disappointing in terms of political praxis.

Yet the choice lies between reporting nothing and reporting it all. Simply put, either the text exists or it does not, and the former is the least bad option. Furthermore, whether they are conscious of it or not, one can postulate that readers are after all potential 'political animals' in the Aristotelian sense of the word.⁸² The only chance to improve or change the place of work would be to tackle it from a dialectical stance, which is of no avail in *Marge Brute* wherein the only viable coping mechanism against gentle barbarism can be found in detachment or spiritual madness. However whistleblowing by default remains vivid. Its diegetic absence makes it revert to the writer's responsibility by engaging in a critical meta-conversation with his readers, a process which restores a sense of political significance to those frantic and monological fragments lost in globalisation.

If Rorty's tyrannical ascendance hits some sort of limit considering the irrepressible awe shareholder Fisher exerts on him, CEO Jacques Pelletier in Delphine de Vigan's *Les Heures souterraines* has no such hindrance that could potentially

⁸¹ Trebiv (2011) 'Entretien avec Laurent Quintreau', *Trebiv* [online] 01 November. Available from: <http://trebiv.over-blog.com/article-entretien-avec-laurent-quintreau-87733636.html> [Accessed 05 May 2016].

⁸² See footnote n° 88 on page 88.

hamper his power of nuisance.⁸³ The novel was the first of its kind to be awarded *le Prix du roman d'entreprise et du travail* in 2010. It was also shortlisted for the Goncourt Prize, adapted for TV in 2014 and for theatre the following year.⁸⁴ One of the main thematic developed here is that of corporate bullying from the point of view of the victim, who also acts as one of the two narrators whose distinct stories are briefly drawn together in the epilogue.

After eight successful and fruitful years of close collaboration with her boss, Jacques Pelletier, deputy marketing director Mathilde Debord's professional values and identity are shattered by the former. During a meeting with a potential business partner, she openly expresses for the first time in public a slight disagreement with Pelletier at some stage of the negotiations:

Ce jour-là, à la fin du mois de septembre, en l'espace de dix minutes, quelque chose avait basculé. Dans l'organisation précise et performante qui régissait leurs rapports, quelque chose s'était immiscé qu'elle n'avait ni vu ni entendu. [...] Ainsi s'était déclenchée une autre mécanique, silencieuse et inflexible, qui n'aurait de cesse de la faire plier.⁸⁵

Like any bully worthy of the name, Pelletier conceals his destructive actions behind a wall of legitimate self-defence by pretending to be victimised when one is in reality the executioner, which is revelatory of the degree of perversion of the individual in such a toyotised environment (see Section Two of Chapter One). His personality disorder fits into the category of narcissistic pervert, a commonplace Frankenstein created by neo-liberalism. Thus, most of Mathilde's colleagues are swift to turn a blind eye to the situation and passively participate in accelerating her ostracism. Lack of workplace solidarity is indeed inherent in the process of *dissociété*. In the narrator's own words:

Au début, l'équipe a continué à lui demander de l'aide, à la consulter, à faire appel à son expérience. Mais tout document validé par elle recevait les foudres de Jacques. [...] Alors peu à peu, Nathalie, Jean, Eric et les autres ont renoncé à franchir la porte de son bureau, à lui demander conseil, ils ont trouvé ailleurs l'appui dont ils avaient besoin.

Ils ont choisi leur camp.

Pour ne pas risquer d'être les prochains sur la liste, pour préserver leur tranquillité. Par lâcheté plus que par malveillance.

Elle n'a pas de rancœur. Parfois elle se dit qu'à vingt-cinq ou trente ans, elle non plus, n'aurait pas eu ce courage.⁸⁶

Like protagonist Amélie in the autobiographical workplace novel *Stupeur et tremblements*,⁸⁷ to which we shall refer on several occasions in this chapter, Mathilde

⁸³ De Vigan, D. (2009) *Les Heures souterraines*, op. cit.

⁸⁴ *Les Heures souterraines* (2015) Directed by Philippe Harel. *Théâtre de Paris* [online] May-June. Available from: <http://www.theatredeparis.com/spectacle/souterraines> [Accessed 18 May 2017].

⁸⁵ De Vigan, D. (2009) *Les Heures souterraines*, op. cit., p. 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

wishes she could try anything that would remind her colleagues of her existence, even to the point of making a fool of herself if that is what it takes. Even though a huge difference exists between the two women as Amélie takes orders from everyone, they are both subjected to the same methodological cruelty that reveals the dark side of global Toyotism. They also find in their imagination a compensatory leverage however exempt from any sense of relief in the case of Mathilde:

Elle pourrait sortir de son bureau, se mettre à hurler dans le couloir, ou bien chanter Bowie à tue-tête, mimer quelques accords plaqués sur une guitare, danser au milieu de l'open space, onduler sur ses talons, se rouler par terre, histoire qu'on la regarde, histoire de se prouver qu'elle existe.⁸⁸

Mathilde owes Pelletier. He literally saved the mother-of-three by offering her a managerial position and she proved herself to be equal to the task. Such an opportunity played a crucial role in helping the healing and reconstruction of her inner and social self following the trauma caused by the sudden loss of her beloved husband. Yet, all of a sudden, the same individual methodically erases her without the slightest explanation. The ambivalent and schizophrenic nature of the place of work ruled by 'gentle barbarians' is exposed for what it is:

L'entreprise avait été le lieu de sa renaissance. L'entreprise l'avait obligée à s'habiller, se coiffer, se maquiller. A sortir de sa torpeur. A reprendre le cours de sa vie. Pendant huit ans elle y était venue avec une forme d'enthousiasme, de conviction. Elle y était venue avec le sentiment d'être utile, d'apporter sa contribution, de prendre part à quelque chose, d'être partie intégrante d'un tout. [...] Aujourd'hui il lui semble que l'entreprise est un lieu qui broie. Un lieu totalitaire, un lieu de prédation, un lieu de mystification et d'abus de pouvoir, un lieu de trahison et de médiocrité.⁸⁹

The fact that her job title and her wages are kept unchanged leaves her caught in a professional loophole that is very similar to a form of social erasure that cannot even be acknowledged as such. Mathilde is 'elle' in the narration. This simple effect of distancing works as a warning to all the Mathildes out there who have strong work ethics and are keen to work doubly hard in order to try to match their male counterparts. 'Est-ce qu'il suffit de ça, d'une réunion, pour que tout bascule?' (De Vigan: 23), as the protagonist wonders. This might precisely be the case taking into account today's workplace and the combination of disproportionate ambitions, hubris and machismo. In this respect, Marie-France Hirigoyen states:

Le harcèlement moral [...] laisse des traces indélébiles qui peuvent aller du stress post-traumatique à un vécu de honte récurrent, ou même des changements durables de la personnalité. La dévalorisation persiste, même si la personne est éloignée de son agresseur. Elle porte une cicatrice

⁸⁷ Nothomb, A. (1999) *Stupeur et tremblements* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel).

⁸⁸ De Vigan, D. (2009) *Les Heures souterraines*, op. cit., p. 99.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

psychologique qui la fragilise et l'amène à vivre dans la crainte et à douter de tout et de tout le monde.⁹⁰

Her last and desperate attempt to bounce back and escape from her boss's grip fails when he blocks her transfer to another department. This last blow forces her to resign in a final attempt to reverse the destructive spiral; a wise decision which nevertheless appears to have come too late as serious psychological damage has been done. In de Vigan's own words: 'A aucun moment ne sera prononcé le mot de harcèlement moral. [...] C'est un livre sur les violences silencieuses de manière plus générale. Et c'est vrai que je parlais du principe que puisque je mettais en scène un personnage dont toute la problématique est de ne pas avoir réussi à se dire au bon moment: "*Je suis victime d'un truc qu'on appelle "harcèlement moral"...* sur lequel je n'ai pas de prise, que je ne maîtrise pas. [...]" Elle a mis trop de temps à se dire ça. Et c'est pour ça qu'elle est piégée.'⁹¹

GP Thibault, the other narrator, takes a lucid look at all these executives with excessive expectations that he has to treat on a regular basis. He knows that today's workplace is a deleterious combination of unforgiving competitiveness and absence of safeguards. Any sign of mental weakness or symptomatic signal coming from the body is therefore systematically repressed as it could put an abrupt end to someone's career:

Il les connaît par cœur, les suradaptés, les performants, les compétitifs. Ceux qui ne s'arrêtent jamais. [...] Il en voit toutes les semaines aussi, des hommes et des femmes épuisés, dépendants des somnifères, grillés comme des ampoules, vidés comme des batteries. Des hommes et des femmes qui appellent un lundi matin parce qu'ils n'en peuvent plus.⁹²

Notwithstanding a place of work deprived of any political struggles, atomised and passive subjects still find themselves able to get a grip on their apathy and fight back collectively in the final text of this section. Nathalie Kuperman's *Nous étions des êtres vivants* unveils the thoughts and feelings of members of staff whose publishing company is in the process of being restructured, transferred to new premises and sold.⁹³ Akin to a classical Greek tragedy adapted for the tertiary sector, a subtle

⁹⁰ Hirigoyen, M-F. (2001) *Le harcèlement moral dans la vie professionnelle, démêler le vrai du faux*, op. cit., p. 202

⁹¹ Rue89 (2009) 'Delphine de Vigan: interview intégrale', Rue89 [online video] 20 September. Available from: <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=de+vigan+les+heures+souterraines+entretien&&view=detail&mid=4BD05A37D85349DF334F4BD05A37D85349DF334F&FORM=VRDGAR> [Accessed 05 May 2016].

⁹² De Vigan, D. (2009) *Les Heures souterraines*, op. cit., p. 219.

⁹³ Kuperman, N. (2010) *Nous étions des êtres vivants* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

mixture of atomised voices echoing or contradicting the master voice of the collective (le chœur) is the crux of the narration and represents a multifaceted expression of today's class recomposition.

Bouts of suppressed anger for some, unavowed hopes of promotion for others, endemic self-deprecation, withdrawal symptoms and inevitable betrayals represent the eclectic narrative features that form the rhythm of the working days. They are characterised by a growing tension that will reach its climax in an unexpected denouement. Thus, threatened by an imminent wave of redundancies and despite an internalised resignation that pervades the least of their demeanours, the employees appear to simply accept their fate. In Kuperman's own words: 'Dans ce livre, on n'assiste pas vraiment au licenciement mais ce qui est important, c'est la menace, c'est la peur. On installe la peur pour faire des gens qui ne réagissent pas, qui deviennent des lâches. [...] Longtemps après, je me suis rendu compte que c'était un livre que j'avais quand même écrit en colère, ... et dans ce sens-là, on pourrait dire que c'est un livre militant.'⁹⁴

The restructuring operates like a violent catalyst that reveals underlying plots, cowardice and rivalries in which the most perverse personalities prevail. The workplace is submitted to a purge. As no alternative option is on the table, a polarised mind game descends into a violent social cleansing of destructive conformity. Indeed, denunciation and smear become the indispensable assets needed to save one's job and be promoted. As schemer Ariane Stein sums up: 'Aujourd'hui, manœuvrer, dénoncer, flatter, faire preuve de cynisme et jouer les forts en thème suffit pour accéder au rang de supérieur. Les compétences passent au second plan.'⁹⁵

The exploration of some of the above writings will continue in Section Four which focuses on the thematic of resistance.

⁹⁴ *Interlignes*, 2010. Nathalie Kuperman. *Figaro Magazine* [online video] 12 November. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8EqmINxhN4> [Accessed 06 May 2016].

⁹⁵ Kuperman, N. (2010) *Nous étions des êtres vivants*, op. cit., p. 204.

3. *The dystopian fiction: The market has won and resistance is pointless*

Adapter les hommes à un travail contraignant! C'est ce qu'on pourrait appeler, en quelque sorte, de "l'eugénisme", ou encore, une sélection des "mieux" adaptés. C'est éthiquement inacceptable! (Huez, D. (2008) *Souffrir au travail*, p. 31).

Workplace literature also speculates on what would happen if the market won. In these writings, global capitalism is no longer a contingent process but fully established, triumphant and with no imaginable alternative. It is still subjected to all sorts of rejections nonetheless incapable of undermining its hegemony. It is accentuated in order to be more striking in its representations and reinforced by a sense of irremediableness and irreversibility. The five texts that follow have a common denominator: to present working-class defeat (and for some its subsequent period of reaction) through dystopian stories. Thus, by slightly displacing it into a parallel fictional universe that 'almost' looks like the real one, absolute defeat works like a stark warning and the worst hypothesis of all.

Yet, despite their inherent anti-idealism, social tragedy becomes a critical object to examine, to reflect upon and above all to avert; a process which allows the necessary distancing effect from defeatism and immobilism. Warning the reader of such nightmarish scenarios may give them some reason for hope and fresh impetus given that global capitalism is forcibly challenged in a composite reality. We shall analyse these in the light of Raymond Williams' classification that distinguishes four types of dystopian fictions:

- a. *The hell*, in which a more wretched kind of life is described as existing elsewhere;
- b. *The externally altered world*, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by an unlooked for or uncontrollable natural event;
- c. *The willed transformation*, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought by social degeneration, by the emergence or re-emergence of harmful kinds of social order, or by the unforeseen yet disastrous consequences of an effort at social improvement;
- d. *The technological transformation*, in which the conditions of life have been worsened by technical development.⁹⁶

A sombre irony governs Lydie Salvayre's engrossing *La Médaille*,⁹⁷ which belongs to Williams' third type: *the willed transformation* (see definition above).⁹⁸ The farcical story is about rewarding the most deserving staff with a mere medal. During the annual award ceremony, a member of the management praises the accomplishments of the company, using the official event to announce radical social

⁹⁶ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., p. 196.

⁹⁷ Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit.

⁹⁸ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

regressions that are presented as progressive and ineluctable. Alternatively, an ordinary worker publicly explains in their own words the harsh conditions of their activities on the production line and the suffering they are constantly subjected to.

Through a total of eight speeches, the ceremony is therefore one of the components of a broad process of social conditioning. The systematic destruction of the working class social advances is the main theme. As Aldous Huxley would darkly put it: 'All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny.'⁹⁹ If a profound sense of abdication is expressed by the thank-you speeches of the rewarded workers, the paternalism that transpires from those of the rulers accentuates the fracture and antagonism of interests between the social classes that even the perfectly staged event cannot mask. From the increasingly schizophrenic narration, a deep sense of unease mixed with mutual rejection emerges between two irreconcilable universes as the story goes round in circles.

The gap between the canonisation of neo-liberalism by the management and the graphic description of suffering by the blighted workers is unbridgeable. Contempt and self-righteousness mixed with a sense of entitlement typify the ruling classes in the Director of Security's peroration. Praising the altruistic life of ex-Leninist Mr Démaret whose conversion to *petite bourgeoisie* is outlined as the path to follow for the proletariat:

Votre sens des relations publiques est au moins aussi grand que votre talent de concepteur. Vous avez gardé des liens étroits avec vos amis de jeunesse, tous occupés à des fonctions considérables. Car vous n'avez jamais abandonné, cher monsieur Démaret, les idéaux généreux de vos vingt ans. Je me suis laissé dire que vous payez votre femme de ménage au-dessus du tarif normal et que vous l'aidez à écrire ses lettres en français. Ce sont des détails qui ne trompent pas.¹⁰⁰

Thus, with similar accents to those of a grotesque group psychotherapy that goes awry, Salvayre underscores the internationalism of exploitation given that such convenient and timeless ceremonies take place regardless of the type of societal model the ordinary workers belong to. She also offers an uncompromising insight into the workplace and the destructive repercussions that inevitably enter the private sphere as operator Auguste Donte transfers the daily humiliations and violence he suffers on the production line onto his wife and children.¹⁰¹ Donte's violent behaviour is condoned and therefore institutionalised by the Consultant in Social Science's

⁹⁹ Huxley, A. (2014) *Brave New World* (London: Vintage Books), p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit., pp. 153-154.

¹⁰¹ See Dejours, C. (2000) *Travail: usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail*, op. cit., p. 108.

simplistic definition of the worker that matches that of a reactionary ideology as the company's educative goal is to police its staff family members, and especially the children who embody the next generation of workers to be exploited, the relief team:

Très traditionaliste, l'ouvrier vrai interdit à ses enfants de parler à table. Si les enfants couinent, le père cogne. Nous sommes sur ce point heureux de constater que l'ouvrier vrai applique au sein de sa famille les mêmes principes disciplinaires que dans son exercice journalier. Ce qui signifie que l'entreprise s'acquitte parfaitement de la mission pédagogique qui lui est impartie.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the narration descends into historical revisionism. In this instance, the questionable role of the Bisson Company CEO's father and of the President of the Republic during the Second World War is highlighted. *Service du travail obligatoire*-like Collaboration is rebranded as the solution for a pacified workplace according to senior management's discourse which praises inter-class cooperation, presenting class divisions as anachronistic, dangerous and counterproductive.¹⁰³ The failure of such a cooperation is depicted as a missed opportunity for the whole European project, which echoes Daniel Serceau's analysis of *This Land is Mine* (*Vivre libre*) by Jean Renoir.¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on the film which takes place during the Second World War, he writes: 'Les rapports de classes y sont parfaitement clairs, et la collaboration s'inscrit dans l'héritage direct de la réaction patronale au Front populaire. [...] Jean Renoir l'a souvent répété, une partie de la bourgeoisie et des masses françaises préférait le nazisme à la révolution.'¹⁰⁵

Paradoxical injunctions reign as for which party controls and stages communication that is used to encourage informing; on the other hand, freedom of speech is systematically criminalised and prohibited. In this respect, the novel is a dystopian variation of Linhart's *L'Etabli* (1978) explored in Section One. Both enact the breaking of post-May 68 collectives. Echoing the strategies of intimidation used by manager Junot in Linhart's text, informer Pinchard shares with pride his coercive methods to win over the assembly:

Sur un registre spécial, j'écris le nom des syndiqués, des saboteurs et de tous ceux qui empêchent la liberté du travail. [...] J'ai mes méthodes à moi. J'y ai beaucoup réfléchi. Je les convoque personnellement dans ma cabine. Ils se pointent. Je les fais poireauter. Debout. Un bon moment. Je reste sans parler. Impavide. [...] Puis je lève la tête. Je les regarde dans les yeux pour leur prouver qu'ils ne me font pas peur. [...] Parce que les forts en gueule sont beaucoup moins arrogants dans l'intimité de ma petite cabine qu'au milieu de leurs supporters.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁰³ Organised by the Vichy regime, the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO) was an obligatory enlistment of hundreds of thousands of French workers who were transferred to Germany in order to work in the country's factories and farms between 1942 and 1944.

¹⁰⁴ *This Land is Mine* (1943) Directed by Jean Renoir [Film]. USA: RKO Radio Pictures.

¹⁰⁵ Serceau, D. (1985) *Jean Renoir, la sagesse du plaisir* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf), p. 143.

¹⁰⁶ Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

La Médaille takes an incisive look at both the rulers and a working class marred by inner prejudice that reinforces disunion and hamper the capability to fight back. Thus, Salvayre avoids a Manichean or selective ideological approach by tackling the machismo of the male workers through the speech of Miss Pizzuto who was regularly harassed by a foreman. The female operator also expresses empathy and solidarity with Christian Laurence, a young intellectual who is said to be writing a novel about the factory and therefore shares all the characteristics of being part of *le mouvement des établis* (see Section One):

Et s'il lui arrivait de se lancer dans une de ses phrases élégantes et pleines de mots difficiles qui lui venaient aussi naturellement qu'on respire, Arrête ton char, pédé, ici t'es pas à l'école! et ils éclataient de rire. Christian Laurence devenait tout pâle. Mais son trouble les excitait. Ils le provoquaient encore. Ils lui cachaient ses outils. Ils le regardaient s'empêtrer au milieu de ses housses avec une jubilation mauvaise. A quoi ça te sert les diplômes, Ducon! Ils le haïssaient d'instinct.¹⁰⁷

Understandably, working as a temp on an assembly line for research purposes does not necessarily go down well with workers who may react with hostility and a sense that they are being treated as laboratory animals.

When Pizzuto's output turns out to be higher than that of her male counterparts on the production line, they cannot accept it and make her pay for what they consider a lack of solidarity. The excerpt below also stresses the importance of work as a fundamental element of the construction of the self.¹⁰⁸ In the female operator's own words:

Les délégués venaient me faire régulièrement des menaces. Vas-y mollo la poule! Calme le jeu sinon c'est nous qu'on va te calmer! [...] Je le faisais pas pour les primes, quoique je crache pas dessus, ni pour être dans les petits papiers de mes chefs, c'est mal me connaître. Je le faisais parce que le travail, c'était malgré tout ma seule raison de me lever, de marcher, de manger et de continuer à vivre [...].¹⁰⁹

She symbolises the archetype of the industrious worker insofar as the importance of work as an existential safeguard is reiterated, echoing the characters' reflections on the subject at the end of *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (Voltaire, 1759) as quoted in the conclusion of Chapter One. On the other hand, one can speculate that keeping staff on a work to rule in terms of productivity is perhaps the only form of resistance and solidarity that the union has managed to establish on the assembly line.

¹⁰⁷ Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

¹⁰⁸ See Dejours, C. (2000) *Travail: usure mentale. Essai de psychopathologie du travail*, op. cit., Part Three.

¹⁰⁹ Salvayre, L. (1993) *La Médaille*, op. cit., pp 57-58.

With its alternative realism, the text sets a dystopian vision by warning what may unfold in the event that resistance, from radical to more subdued forms of action, is crushed to a point of no return. It is also a metaphor for the triumph of managerial narratives (see Section Two of Chapter One) whose goal is to promote an unconditional surrender of the labour movement represented by the group of subversive workers that is silenced and ends up falling into line, fooled by promises of better working conditions and wage increases.¹¹⁰ In contrast, from the reader's viewpoint, the praises and sermons used by the management are so grotesque that they simply backfire whilst ridiculing the supposedly potency of the company. *La Médaille* was also adapted for theatre and was performed at the *Théâtre du Rond-Point* in Paris, followed by a successful nationwide tour in 2010.¹¹¹

In accordance with Williams' *willed transformation* defined by 'the emergence or re-emergence of harmful kinds of social order',¹¹² overestimation of the power of capital is one of the core thematics that characterises novels by Stéphane Osmont, an author and essayist whose trilogy entitled *Le Capital*, *Le Manifeste* and *L'Idéologie*, forms a distant by-product of Karl Marx's works.¹¹³ It gives a damning and acidic indictment of the damages done by corporate capitalism and of strategies of manipulation used by politicians and spin doctors. The first text admirably succeeds in revealing the excesses of the financial system embodied by Marc Tourneullerie, an ENA graduate and CEO.

A rogue, gross and Balzacian careerist, the protagonist reveals himself as an outstanding orator whose fantasy is to turn the current system short of a global casino at the mercy of market fluctuations and drastic restructurings. Depending on the opportunities that would potentially increase his personal fame and wealth, he is driven by three obsessions: big money, corporate power and pornography. His focal agenda is therefore to turn the Crédit Général, the bank he leads, into a springboard that will establish once and for all the hegemony of financial capitalism. His thrust for drastic reforms is so frantic that he soon reaches the status of corporate cyber-guide

¹¹⁰ A bleak outcome which echoes that of the May 68 revolt. (See Vigna, X. (2007) *L'insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68, Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes), pp. 82-83.)

¹¹¹ Kilhoffer, D. (2010) 'La Médaille', *La critique à la dent féroce* [online] 20 September. Available from: <http://rhinoceros.eu/2010/09/la-medaille-d-apres-lydie-salvayre/> [Accessed 11 May 2016].

¹¹² Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., p. 196.

¹¹³ Osmont, S. (2004) *Le Capital*; (2006) *Le Manifeste*; (2010) *L'Idéologie* (Paris: Editions Grasset).

whose rhetoric and convictions force all companies listed on the stock exchange to get in line with his or disappear:

Pour ramener la banque dans les bornes de la gestion rationnelle, je décidai de passer la totalité du système au hachoir de l'audit organisationnel. Discipline militaire, coupe au carré, tout le monde au rapport. Imaginer les organigrammes dictatoriaux qui en sortiraient me réjouissait. Des schémas de procédures, raides comme la justice, seraient inventés au kilomètre et imposés sur-le-champ. Imparables. Dévastateurs. Plus forts que les hommes.¹¹⁴

Such a practice spreads like wildfire and transforms global capitalism into its most fundamentalist and brutal expression, with the predictable consent, support and admiration of the shareholders – for a period of time at least – but also of the gullible workforce. A corporate caricature, Tourneuillerie's psychological profile is mirrored through a chaotic proliferation of historical references, either wartime events-related or political slogans that keep surfacing through his inner thoughts and speech mannerisms. Historical events are in turn remixed into syntactic revisionism as his fake rhetoric is perversely peppered with a series of occurrences completely outsourced from their original contexts and processed into kitsch and populist reasoning.

The CEO's private life is another story, precisely his Achilles heel. Tourneuillerie's Trump-esque and charismatic persona that galvanises audiences is in reality merely Houellebecquian, completely undermined by the pathetic manner in which he behaves with the opposite sex. Besides being a grotesque incarnation of today's lust for wealth and fame, he also embodies the next expression of socio-pathological egos defined by cynicism and misogyny.¹¹⁵ In most women's eyes, he is merely a bland, coarse and physically repulsive businessman; a full wallet at best. In Osmont's own words: 'Il veut être très riche mais il n'arrive jamais à en jouir. Justement, il veut être très riche parce que, à chaque fois, il fabrique du manque et de la frustration. Et comme il n'arrive pas à jouir de la vie, le substitut à cette vie-là qu'il n'arrive pas à avoir, c'est l'accumulation de l'argent.'¹¹⁶

A transfer and sublimation of his libidinal impulses are certainly invested into the corporate sphere but there is more to it. His aggressive approach to economic issues becomes proportional to his sexual frustrations and impotence 'car la sexualité, à

¹¹⁴ Osmont, S. (2004) *Le Capital*, op. cit., p. 153.

¹¹⁵ Strenger, C. (2016) 'Donald Trump et le déclin de la démocratie', *Le Point* [online] 18 May. Available from: http://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/sebastien-le-fol/carlo-strenger-donald-trump-et-le-declin-de-la-democratie-18-05-2016-2040092_1913.php [Accessed 19 May 2016].

¹¹⁶ INA (2014) 'Interview Stéphane Osmont pour Le Capital', *Institut national de l'audiovisuel* [online] 23 June. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgsUUwZjiSk> [Accessed 15 May 2016].

laquelle le processus du refoulement refuse les satisfactions voulues par la nature, se tourne vers toutes sortes de satisfactions de remplacement.’¹¹⁷ He allows himself to be dragged worldwide from one boardroom to the next at a hectic pace which eventually takes its toll as increasing signs of acute paranoia also emerge, combined with a pathological tendency to blame others for his failures.¹¹⁸

The similarities between Stéphane Osmont’s *Le Capital* and Bernard Mourad’s *Les actifs corporels* (see below) are indisputable with novels written by influential American writer Don DeLillo. Such a cacophonous trend of literary works, a counter-avatar of global capitalism and its representatives, is refreshing in terms of shaping a critique of the corporate world. Has *Le Capital*’s dystopian status diminished since Donald Trump’s election in 2016? One may wonder.

In the contemporary dystopian business novel, egomaniac Marc Tourneuillerie is not the most abject expression of finance capitalism but represents a mere and already outmoded conventional archetype that the next text dismisses. The Foucault-esque Bernard Mourad’s *Les actifs corporels*,¹¹⁹ also belongs to Williams’ third type of dystopian fictions: *the willed transformation*, ‘in which the scientific spirit and applied science are subordinate to or simply associated with a dominant emphasis on social and political (including revolutionary) transformation [...]’.¹²⁰ It relates the rise and fall of protagonist and pioneer consultant Alexandre Guyot who becomes the first human to be listed at stock exchanges around the world as a *Société-Personne*. His accession to the CAC 40 paves the way for an unprecedented mutation of capital: corporeal and psychological privatisation heralded by the NEI (*la nouvelle économie individuelle*). In the narrator’s own account:

Difficile de s’habituer à cette menotte électronique. Et pourtant il le faudrait: régulation oblige. Depuis sa cotation le jeudi précédent, il était contraint de porter jour et nuit ce boîtier disgracieux [...]. Un concentré de technologie qui affichait à tout instant son cours de Bourse, ainsi que l’intégration des informations relatives à son titre.¹²¹

In this new world order driven by an all-out competition, share value has become the ultimate yardstick and therefore pervades, defines or invalidates all human relationships:

¹¹⁷ Reich, W. (1972) *La psychologie de masse du fascisme*, op. cit., p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Tourneuillerie dies of a massive heart attack triggered by an overdose of amphetamines.

¹¹⁹ Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels* (Paris: Editions Jean-Claude Lattès).

¹²⁰ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., p. 197.

¹²¹ Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels*, op. cit., p. 90.

La mère était assise, voûtée à la droite de Boyden [...] Oui, elle était devenue basement vénale. C'était cette cotation aussi, ça l'avait rendue chose. Elle rêvait même, ces temps-ci, que ses veines charriaient de l'épargne liquide. Epaisse et vermeille – gorgée de plus-value.¹²²

Sexed up as a new dawn as well as the way to overcome all the dysfunctional and erring ways of the system, financialisation and corporeality merge to complete a process of ultimate commodification that will give each listed individual corporate omnipotence and international recognition. At the end of his first official day as a newly born Person-Company, Guyot is keen to evocatively compare his sense of mixed jubilation, hope and exhaustion to that of a cancer patient following their first chemotherapy treatment:

Il tentait de rétablir une juste distance entre ses constituants internes – des particules de désirs vagues et contradictoires. Un semblant d'ordre et d'harmonie après cette épuisante journée, qui lui avait laissé l'impression âcre d'un premier jour de traitement. Les cancéreux, pensait-il, éprouvaient certainement le même genre de sentiment ambivalent – un mélange d'appréhension, d'espoir et d'exténuation – à l'issue de leur séance inaugurale de chimiothérapie.¹²³

The Nietzschean perspective of a radical reinterpretation of moral values forced upon the character's social and intimate transformation establishes a paradigm shift in which the flesh, the identity of one individual and the global financial system become an entity that inaugurates a nightmarish definition of humanity. This socio-economical shift is reflected by Jameson when he points to the emergence of a new kind of Arendtian ego in the aftermath of a sudden breakdown of long-term established social norms. He writes:

The concept of reification [...] conveys the historical situation in which the emergence of the ego or centered subject can be understood: the dissolution of the older organic or hierarchical social groups, the universal commodification of the labor-power of individuals and their confrontation as equivalent units within the framework of the market, the *anomie* of these now "free" and isolated individual subjects to which the protective development of a monadic armature alone comes as something of a compensation.¹²⁴

To reinforce the point, the same dystopian outcome is also contemplated in Thierry Beinstingel's autobiographical *Retour aux mots sauvages*, a text that will be explored in the next section, and from which the following passage is extracted:

Peut-être valoriser son propre corps en le découpant en actions à vendre est-il la seule manière qui reste à l'homme libéral pour atteindre la postérité. Enfin rompre l'identité du corps. Le dépecer sur une table métallique. Un employé heureux est plus performant, un salarié malheureux ne crée pas de valeur: phrases réelles, publiées lors des tristes événements, autant de preuves d'un totalitarisme entièrement dévoué au profit, corps et âme.¹²⁵

¹²² Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels*, op. cit., p. 224.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 57.

¹²⁴ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 140.

¹²⁵ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 197.

Yet the corrosive features of capital can no longer be ignored. Hence the sudden suicide of girl-friend Claire, with whom Guyot was forced to split, given that one of the prerequisites for being listed is to be single. Her death triggers a nervous breakdown that leaves the protagonist's shares plummeting whereas other Company-Persons, such as his newly listed colleague Laurence Kellerman, keep rising exponentially. Incapable of adapting and living up to his reconfigured and highly mediated identity, accumulating blunder after blunder, he becomes a liability for his shareholders whose last hope is to concede to vengeful Kellerman's hostile takeover bid. The move condemns him to a life of uncompromising submission to an enforced and new partnership:

L'opération était enclenchée. Les titres changeaient de mains. De petits fragments de lui-même que ses actionnaires bazardaient. Certains par lassitude, d'autres par intérêt. Et que Laurence ramassait, agile, du bout des doigts [...].¹²⁶

Guyot's zombification as a Company-Person is undoubtedly rescued following the vicious transaction; however what is left of his intimacy, the remnants of the last proof of his humanity, is almost eradicated. In Mourad's own words: 'Alexandre Guyot est en effet une coquille vide. [...] Je souhaitais en faire une marionnette du système. Il devient le jouet d'événements qui le dépassent. [...] En fait, à travers cette démonstration, j'ai voulu démontrer que l'on pouvait construire un raisonnement très cohérent et convaincant d'une hérésie. Il s'agissait de démonter le mécanisme de construction des idées dominantes.'¹²⁷ The dispossessed man is haunted by a comforting nostalgia insofar as he can only find solace in the vivid memories of his father and Claire, now both deceased, representing a foregone Utopia.

Finally, the birth of his son, who is synecdochically summed up as 'un tas de chair chiffonnée, à l'ossature molle, au cheveu rare et avec déjà, trouvait-il, une petite tête de cadre',¹²⁸ crowns the perennality of a new plutocracy established on financial assets and defined by an atavistic conformism. Such a cast is determined to avoid any social interaction with those who are not listed, as the greeting 'Comment allez-vous?' has been replaced by 'Combien valez-vous?'. Teetering between a satire of financier capitalism and a dystopian projection of its excesses, the core narrative of *Les actifs corporels* mainly reflects on the ethical implications that would follow a

¹²⁶ Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels*, op. cit., p. 226.

¹²⁷ *Buzz littéraire* (2015) 'Rencontre avec Bernard Mourad, auteur de "Les actifs corporels" (2006)', *Buzz-litteraire.com* [online] 18 June. Available from: <http://www.buzz-litteraire.com/rencontre-avec-bernard-mourad-auteur-de-les-actifs-corporels-2006/> [Accessed 15 July 2015].

¹²⁸ Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels*, op. cit., p. 241.

complete fusion between privacy, privatisation and monetised corporeality in an illusory pacified *dissociété* that has invented the *citoyen-entreprise*.¹²⁹ This expression can either be considered an oxymoron or as being made up of two unequivocally incompatible terms of which a new socio-economic totality emerges.¹³⁰

The intricate connectivity between the town and the Company, which is described as limitless, has no equivalent in Philippe Claudel's allegorical novel *L'Enquête* that falls into the second type of Raymond Williams' classification of dystopian fictions: 'the externally altered world, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by an unlooked for or uncontrollable natural event.' The text recounts the slow agony of its anti-hero whose mission is to shed light on the twenty-two unexplained suicides that have occurred in a mysterious company.¹³¹ One is immediately plunged into a predetermined journey that leads to the main character's elimination whilst all his attempts to investigate fall short. Reality and paranoia become so entangled throughout the story that it is impossible to separate them as even the laws of physics are useless in a world driven by a burlesque but raw cruelty. The Company covers all the production sectors and has swallowed the urban area: a macrocosm of a defeated society.

The numerous references to the embedded dehumanisation of the universe of the enterprise, analogous to an overprotected military and concentrationary space, are paramount.¹³² The absurd power of bureaucracy and encounters with odd and unnamed individuals give the text a supernatural resonance with metaphorical scenes oscillating between the universes characterised by Franz Kafka and Lewis Carroll. As for the hyperbolic titles of each character encountered, they merely hide their insignificance and inability to reverse the social determinism that has turned them into subservient puppets trapped in a dehistoricised system of exploitation:

Les monarques aujourd'hui n'ont plus ni tête ni visage. Ce sont des mécanismes financiers complexes, des algorithmes, des projections, des spéculations sur les risques et les pertes, des équations au cinquième degré. Leurs trônes sont immatériels, ce sont des écrans, des fibres optiques, des circuits imprimés, et leurs sangs bleus, les informations cryptées qui y circulent à des vitesses supérieures à celle de la lumière. Leurs châteaux sont devenus des banques de données.¹³³

¹²⁹ Mourad, B. (2006) *Les actifs corporels*, op. cit., p. 72.

¹³⁰ See Quan, K. (2013) 'Employees Get Tattoo of Company Logo for Pay Rise', *Time* [online] 02 May. Available from: <http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/05/02/employees-get-tattoo-of-company-logo-for-pay-rise/> [Accessed 15 December 2013].

¹³¹ Claudel, P. (2010) *L'Enquête*, op. cit.

¹³² See Mandeville, B. (2010) *The Fable of the Bees*, op. cit.

¹³³ Claudel, P. (2010) *L'Enquête*, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

However ‘trivial’ thematic and issues related to the workplace still manage to keep a grip on reality, such as struggling with job precarity and bending the rules to make ends meet, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

L’Enquêteur ne comprenait plus rien.
« J’ai bien cru que vous alliez me perdre...
- Vous êtes donc bien celui qui... Vous êtes le Guide? »
L’homme prit subitement un air très ennuyé.
« Justement non. Après une certaine heure, je deviens le Veilleur... Vous comprenez, mon salaire est tellement faible... Je me suis arrangé pour cumuler les deux postes en intervenant dans le système informatique, mais si quelqu’un de la Direction Centrale l’apprend, je suis fichu... [...] Je n’ai pas d’autre solution pour m’en sortir. C’est humiliant, mais, que voulez-vous, quand on n’a pas l’étoffe d’un premier rôle, on est bien obligé de multiplier les figurations pour s’en sortir... [...] »¹³⁴

The more the story unfolds the more factitious the characters’ interactions become. The Company is an invisible grand torturer that makes the Investigator’s mission impossible by subjecting him to psychological and physical torments. He ends up forgetting his own name, never revealed to the reader. He embodies the exact epitome of a failed investigator whose free will and determination are useless in such a predictive story. Attempting to grasp what the multinational represents is of no avail. The novel is an allegory of the frailty of the human condition, which remains powerless in the face of absolute globalisation. As Raymond Williams remarks: ‘The common emphasis is on human limitation or indeed human powerlessness: the event saves or destroys us, and we are its objects. [...] the natural world deploys forces beyond human control, thus setting limits or annulling all human achievement.’¹³⁵ The protagonist’s journey takes place in a supernatural bureaucracy that deprives suffering of any metaphysical justification except that of the Company’s limitless taylorisation and expansion. In his own words:

L’Entreprise se développe vite. On se demande qui la dirige. Car je ne parviens pas à comprendre sa stratégie. Elle a besoin de nouveaux locaux, mais elle s’en débarrasse tout aussi vite car elle est dans le même temps en perpétuelle restructuration, et il y a parfois des erreurs regrettables dont certains sont victimes. Les cadences imposées sont telles que les Transporteurs chargent les containers alors même que des hommes y travaillent encore.¹³⁶

There is no way to adopt a radical stance that could alter the social order. The reality is summed up by the complete naturalisation of the power of the Company for which individuals are mere rejects. Reflecting on his work, Claudel states : ‘Un texte naît toujours aussi par rapport à un refus, par rapport à un cri de colère, en l’occurrence. [...] Je pense que le fait qu’on ait donné autant d’importance à la valeur

¹³⁴ Claudel, P. (2010) *L’Enquête*, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

¹³⁵ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., pp. 198-199.

¹³⁶ Claudel, P. (2010) *L’Enquête*, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

travail, au détriment d'autres éléments constitutifs de la personne et de la personnalité, et de la vie humaine fait qu'aujourd'hui, comme ces conditions de travail sont devenues assez difficiles et que la compétition est rude, et bien l'homme au travail devient un homme souffrant.¹³⁷

If the Company has crushed the fabric of the society in which it has prospered in *L'Enquête* wherein suffering is institutionalised, the projected showcase of a supposedly civilised community is perfectly fictionalised in Jean-Christophe Rufin's novel *Globalia*, a 'société du post-travail'¹³⁸ in which suffering is *a contrario* taboo.¹³⁹ Based on Williams' categorisation, the text falls into the first and third types, which are respectively '*the hell*, in which a more wretched kind of life is described as existing elsewhere', and '*the willed transformation*, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought by social degeneration, by the emergence or re-emergence of harmful kinds of social order, or by the unforeseen yet disastrous consequences of an effort at social improvement.'¹⁴⁰ Thus '*Liberté, Sécurité, Prospérité*' are the founding pillars of democracy in this dystopian projection of a globalised France.¹⁴¹ In a tacit deal, all citizens are requested to promote its values, albeit that they are just preaching to the converted, and live their lives in accordance with the majority's aspirations whilst making the most of the extensive choice of entertainment put at their disposal. Anything that contradicts the status quo is left unsaid. Refusing to comply and to enjoy the advantages provided by the regime is inconceivable, at best a lack of taste and an error of judgment; at worst, a pathological trait or a threat to its cohesion.

Akin to Le Goff's concept of 'gentle barbarism', Raffaele Simone's *Le Monstre doux* analyses the causes of the collapse of the left in Italy and in Europe and the emergence of a globalitarian populist right.¹⁴² He borrows the expression 'monstre doux' from Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835) in which is outlined a new form of domination that 's'ingérerait jusque dans la vie privée des

¹³⁷ DeodaTV (2010) 'Philippe Claudel', DeodaTV [online interview] 14 December. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Um1w5XQ4m0> [Accessed 12 May 2016].

¹³⁸ Durand, J-P. (1993) *Vers la société du post-travail ? L'Homme et la société*, Volume 109, n° 3, pp. 117-126.

¹³⁹ Rufin, J-C. (2004) *Globalia* (Paris: Editions Gallimard).

¹⁴⁰ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

¹⁴¹ The other analogy is that of the French Republican motto: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. The reference to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) is also striking insofar as the tripartite motto 'Community, Identity, Stability' defines the ideology of the World State in its incipit.

¹⁴² Simone, R. (2010) *Le Monstre doux. L'Occident vire-t-il à droite ?* (Paris: Collection Le Débat, Gallimard).

citoyens, développant un autoritarisme "*plus étendu et plus doux*", qui "*dégraderait les hommes sans les tourmenter*". Il pourvoit à leur sécurité (...), facilite leurs plaisirs (...). Il ne brise pas les volontés mais il les amollit (...), il éteint, il hébète."'¹⁴³

Yet there are some territories populated by rebels who don't share the collective utopian ideal. They are forbidden and therefore not accessible to the Globalians – for whom they simply don't exist – given that they are considered extremely dangerous. As a result of a post-work society, integration has failed and a whole underclass has emerged, excluded from the new societal model. One can infer that they are inhabited by a marginalised and demonised post-working class akin to that of *les banlieues* that surround some affluent French cities. The text echoes popular films such as *Banlieue 13* and its sequel *Banlieue 13 Ultimatum* in terms of common thematic.¹⁴⁴ Deprived of any symbolic or socio-economic centrality and portrayed as the arch enemy, the underclass is completely banned from the narrative of the globalitarian regime. As a satire of hedonism, consumerism and general apathy, *Globalia* rests upon pseudo-democratic values conveyed by a semantic system at the service of a LQR-style discourse.¹⁴⁵ This is well-oiled ideological propaganda, the goal of which is to conceal that society is nevertheless an apartheid regime ruled by a passive-aggressive oligarchy, as summed up in the excerpt below:

La liberté d'expression était totale en Globalia. Cependant, bien peu de gens s'écartaient, dans leurs propos, des opinions convenues. Officiellement, il n'y avait rien à craindre à dire ce qu'on voulait. Pourtant une sourde indignation était perceptible chaque fois que l'on émettait des avis discordants, surtout s'ils contenaient des critiques à l'égard de la société globalienne. Il était admis par tous que Globalia était une démocratie parfaite et que c'était une chance immense d'y vivre.¹⁴⁶

Thus if *Globalia* puts French democracy, and its republican values to the test of globalisation and marketisation in a dystopian alternative, it also functions as an effective satire of worldwide societies by extension.¹⁴⁷ (One can draw a parallel with what has happened in Dubai where the police have called unhappy citizens in order to investigate the reasons for their unhappiness following a government survey.)¹⁴⁸ The

¹⁴³ In Joignot, F. (2010) 'Raffaele Simone: 'Pourquoi l'Europe s'enracine à droite'', *Le Monde* [online] 14 October. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/10/14/pourquoi-l-europe-s-enracine-a-droite_1409667_823448.html [Accessed 18 August 2014].

¹⁴⁴ *Banlieue 13* (2004) Directed by Pierre Morel [Film]; *Banlieue 13 Ultimatum* (2009) Directed by Patrick Alessandrin [Film]. France: EuropaCorp. Both films were written and produced by Luc Besson.

¹⁴⁵ Eric Hazan's *Lingua Quintae Respublicae* (2006), as referenced in Section Two of Chapter One.

¹⁴⁶ Rufin, J-C. (2004) *Globalia*, op. cit., p. 186.

¹⁴⁷ See Brune, F. (2000) *Sous le soleil de Big Brother, Précis sur '1984' à l'usage des années 2000* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan).

¹⁴⁸ Bhutia, J. (2015) 'In pursuit of happiness, Dubai police call up unhappy citizens', *International Business Times* [online] 27 October. Available from: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/pursuit-happiness-dubai-police-call-unhappy-citizens-1525879> [Accessed 12 November 2015].

novel's political and social significance validates the emergence of a new kind of societal system, paving the way for the hegemony of *démocratatures*.¹⁴⁹

If resistance is by nature impossible or at best expressed via doomed attempts of resilience in dystopian fictions, it is nonetheless important to close this work with a spirit of opposition and confrontation which certain writings effectively deliver through inspirational characters' strength of mind, strategies and deeds. As gradually addressed throughout this thesis, resistance leads to all forms of reappropriation and retribution, from the restoration of pride to financial compensation in accordance with existing employees' rights. Moreover, whistleblowing and other overt or subdued forms of resistance show a capacity to surpass their fragmented expression through strong narration as is developed in the last section of this chapter.

4. *Resistance(s)*

L'esprit de lutte a de l'haleine, du nerf, du jarret, de l'audace, de la crinière, le thorax large, les hanches solides, il sait faire front à la résistance et se tient ferme dans l'action, il peut être vaincu, mais non soumis. (Barratin, A. (1913) *De toutes les paroisses*).

In *L'Enquête* (Claudel: 2010, Section Three), an implied apology for sabotage is presented as the only way to make a difference in a world controlled by elusive exploiters. 'Si vous brisez un ordinateur de l'Entreprise, un parmi des milliers, vous coupez un doigt au monarque.'¹⁵⁰ However it appears more like wishful thinking than a genuine desire to take action in the novel's improbable and fossilised universe. The Guard's determination to bend the rules is delivered with a 'work to rule' attitude combined with what can be considered a futile yet indispensable act of individual rejection as scattered traces of resistance subsist amongst the wretched of the workplace.

Vous êtes de quel service? Reprit le Garde. Nettoyage? Un esclave moderne! Un de plus! J'espère que vous ne vous donnez pas à fond au moins? Vous et moi, ainsi que des milliers d'autres, ne comptons pas pour eux. Nous ne sommes rien. [...] Le règlement, je m'assois dessus. Ils nous font faire un sale travail que personne ne veut faire? Faisons-le salement! Je suis un homme libre.¹⁵¹

If he demonstrates awareness with regard to his status, he is an exception in the novel. Thanks to his quixotic foolishness, he remains uncompromising, unvanquished and shows an undeterred resilience, therefore encapsulating a minimal idea of liberty.

¹⁴⁹ Neologism created by sociologist Max Liniger-Goumas (1992), based on the combination of *démocratie* and *dictature*. (In *La démocratie, dictature camouflée, démocratie truquée* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan)).

¹⁵⁰ Claudel, P. (2010) *L'Enquête*, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 136.

The character's working conditions echo those of a significant number of workers trapped in dead-end jobs yet keeping a salutary detachment. The battle for control goes on and examples to corroborate this are rife in Section Two of Chapter One.

Against all expectations, another unequivocal expression of resistance breaks out in *Nous étions tous des êtres vivants* (Kuperman, 2010: Section Two). If the will to fight back exists among staff, it is nonetheless hampered by a lack of *savoir-faire*, an absence of militant culture and adequate lexicon that could have made a difference in the way the restructuring is handled. As a consequence, the staff do their best to clumsily resist without being capable of organising a convincing collective retaliation:

LE CHŒUR: Nous avons voté et décidé que nous soutiendrons le comité d'entreprise dans sa décision de s'opposer au rachat tant que nous ne serons pas rassurés sur le volet social. Nous apprenons qu'un volet peut être social. [...] Nous empruntons leur vocabulaire, réclamons un business plan, nous préoccupons de la façon dont on va être "managés". [...] Tenir bon nous anéantit, nos forces s'amenuisent. Nous remettons en question la pertinence d'une opposition. Est-ce que ce ne serait pas une manière de signer notre perte? Et pourtant nous luttons, mais nous luttons assis.¹⁵²

As there is no memory of an alternative language to that of the management, it is therefore apparent there is no alternative. The insidious process of internalisation of the managerial discourse by the employees has become irreversible as a sense of resignation permeates the story and seals the fate of the workplace: 'Nous affichons des sourires, sommes sur le point de proclamer que nous avons la chance d'avoir un poste et qu'il est nécessaire de remettre en question nos méthodes de travail.'¹⁵³ The staff's lack of spirit in fighting back makes the redundancy process irreparable. If ferments of rebellion subsist, almost unavowed, they remain disconnected from points of reference perceived to have happened a long time ago. For the wrong reasons, a nostalgic and short-lived glimpse of distorted solidarity as a mere vestige of past class struggles associated with a historical and exceptional bygone era eventually takes place. The 'Keynesian respite' of the post-war boom period is evoked in the following anaphoric passage:

LE CHŒUR: [...] de chansons révolutionnaires qui nous rappellent qu'un autre monde a existé, un monde de courage et de revendications, un monde où l'on s'arrête tous de travailler en même temps pour exprimer la réprobation [...]. Le monde a sorti son cran d'arrêt, il y a longtemps, puis a repris sa course. Mais le moment a existé.¹⁵⁴

The last sentence outlines that nostalgia for a society where workers were less afraid of rulers who were in their turn a little bit more afraid of the former is

¹⁵² Kuperman, N. (2010) *Nous étions des êtres vivants* (Paris: Editions Gallimard), p. 34.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

unearthed. This nostalgic element has been central to other writings through the 2000s, e.g. Aurélie Filippetti's *Les Derniers Jours de la classe ouvrière*, Franck Magloire's *Ouvrière* and Martine Sonnet's *Atelier 62*.¹⁵⁵ Either by praising the achievements or by highlighting the shortcomings of the working class, these poignant and eulogistic homages validate a bygone era. In the case of Filippetti's novel, childhood memories and class melancholy converge into a stylistic *aufhebung*¹⁵⁶ that allows otherness to occur. In Enzo Traverso's own words:

I think that melancholia can be a form of resistance, fed by a reflexive sensibility. For Koselleck, the history written by the conquered is a critical history, as against the apologetic history of the victors. Melancholia is a resource for knowledge, understanding and intervening in the present. On the left, there is sometimes a tendency to say "We have to start everything from scratch again." This lack of memory weakens us. It was one thing to invent socialism in the nineteenth century, but it is quite another thing to reinvent it at the beginning of the twenty-first, as if nothing had happened.¹⁵⁷

Ultimately, *Nous étions tous des êtres vivants* is nonetheless that of a rehabilitated courage and non-compliance. Rose's heartfelt cry 'Tais-toi!' (Kuperman: 226) triggers a mimetic reprobation as staff spontaneously boycott the meeting by leaving together. The realisation that they have nothing to lose apart from accepting an irreversible and programmed social erasure transcends these ordinary archetypal characters' resignation to the point where one of them suggests that they sequester their boss. His proposal is received with a liberatory and contagious collective laugh, a precursory symptom of a shared desire not to admit defeat without a proper attempt against the rulers, a laugh that resurrects the language of the aforementioned bygone era. Thus, whatever it means in terms of outcome, rediscovered dialectic is still capable of surpassing so-called deterministic defeatism. This reopens an avenue of unknowns and possibilities by rehabilitating and re-engaging subjects with historical contingency, even if it is by a whisker. It shows that resistance is like a rusty language that one takes for dead. Yet dead and rusty are not the same. As the text demonstrates, there is a strong sense of unexpectedness accompanying the outburst of a collective refusal. Such an upheaval remains somehow rooted in historical materialism and is the result of a subterranean process in which class tensions have festered. In this instance, there is a threshold above which employees cannot take it anymore.

¹⁵⁵ Filippetti, A. (2003) *Les Derniers Jours de la classe ouvrière* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche); Magloire, F. (2008) *Ouvrière* (Paris: Point Editeur); Sonnet, M. (2008) *Atelier 62* (Bazas: Editions Le temps qu'il fait).

¹⁵⁶ Sublation (translated from German).

¹⁵⁷ Faure, S. (2017) "'The Left is a history of defeat': an interview with Enzo Traverso", *Verso* [online] 31 January. Available from: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3077-the-left-is-a-history-of-defeats-an-interview-with-enzo-traverso> [Accessed 29 July 2017].

We will now explore writings in which expressions of resistance explicitly or implicitly emerge from the breeding ground of a collective political defeat and how they clearly manifest themselves in an individual or collective manner.

As powerful as a manifesto against job degradation, the difficulties of resisting globalisation are uncompromisingly tackled in Thierry Beinstingel's autobiographical novel *Retour aux mots sauvages*.¹⁵⁸ '360° occupational training' against the backdrop of a national wave of suicides among telephone operators outlines the main thematics of the text. The narrator, and long-time electrician, is offered a full-time job in a call centre after a long period of unemployment. As well as starting his professional career from scratch, he is renamed Eric – the identity of his operator persona – whereas his real name is never divulged;¹⁵⁹ a strong symbol for a transformative moment that echoes the flattened identities in *L'Enquête* (Claudel, 2010: Section Three). Hence his journey is an archetypal example of atomisation through incessant conflicts between the individual and the computer, between a fossilised and compulsory script and a creative and unpredictable language which evolves into a literature of resistance.¹⁶⁰

For comparison, reflecting on the call centres in modern India, Christian Salmon describes in *Storytelling* the night shifts of employees who are in synch with daytime North America in the wake of globalisation. He observes that the operators use Western names in order to embrace the American life by proxy and reach the consumers living on the other side of the planet from their Bombay desks. They live two distinct existences, torn between two irreconcilable cultures and ways of life so that the Americanisation required by their jobs ends up being inlaid in their flesh:

La nuit, Namrata, Vandana et Oaref deviennent Naomi, Osmond et Nikki. [...] Comme des immigrés pénétrant sur le sol américain, ils doivent changer de nom. Pourtant, ils n'ont pas quitté leur pays ni franchi de frontière, c'est la frontière qui les traverse: chaque soir, en s'asseyant devant leur écran, ils deviennent américains. [...] Peu à peu, ces jeunes "s'intègrent [...] au pseudo-style de vie américain qu'ils sont forcés d'adopter, au point de subir une transformation fondamentale, ils deviennent leur job", commente Radhika Chadha, une consultante indienne en stratégie. [...] Les six employés décrits dans *John & Jane*, le documentaire d'Ashim Ahluwalia, présentent à des degrés divers des symptômes de distorsion de la personnalité.¹⁶¹

In Eric's case, the rift is less geographical than temporal. It is the consequence of the irreconcilability between two economic models defined on the one hand by job

¹⁵⁸ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁹ Although we shall infer that his real name is Thierry insofar as the text is autobiographical.

¹⁶⁰ See Théry, L. (2010) *Le travail intenable, Résister collectivement à l'intensification du travail* (Paris: Editions La Découverte).

¹⁶¹ Salmon, C. (2007) *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, op. cit., pp. 75-79.

security and strong trade unionism and on the other by endemic precariousness and atomisation. The fifty-something protagonist condenses all the socio-economic transformations that have occurred during the past three decades. He laments the gap between workers in their fifties and the younger generation, who are less inclined to have a political conscience and are more apt to comply to the demands of the market:

Ce n'est pas un hasard si la plupart des victimes ont plus de cinquante ans. Leur éthique s'est forgée sur les idées d'alors: construire un monde meilleur, égalitaire, collectif. Les plus jeunes, qui n'ont connu que l'individualisme forcené, résistent mieux [...]. Pour eux, c'est plus facile de vendre du n'importe quoi à n'importe qui.¹⁶²

The process of disconnection inherent in his daily tasks starts to take its toll. Spontaneity, creativity and initiative have been replaced by a pre-established script for which a robotic language becomes a one-way communication at the service of inaccessible profiteers. From simply forgetting to say hello to his local baker to recurrent insomnia during which the pre-scripted language pervades his conscience and operates like a 'textual harassment',¹⁶³ the anti-hero's solitary resistance is characterised by a continuous effort to keep his mind and his body on the same plane. Despite this, he remains determined to change his professional avatar into a person with humanistic values instead of a 'salesrobot' engineered for the single purpose of overcoming its quota of daily sales. His mental resistance also manifests itself by cherishing and finding solace in his holiday memories. He therefore makes the point of proving that a better world exists out of the workplace and such a certainty makes his daily tasks less binding and meaningless: a few handwritten words by way of a diary, like a reminder to which he refers on a regular basis and which keeps him alive:

C'est l'été, le bonheur. Au retour, il notera simplement sur son carnet, rubrique course à pied, encre verte du stylo à quatre couleurs: du 25 juillet au 8 août, environ 60 km au total, à raison de deux fois par jour à allure modérée. Mais chaque fois qu'il lira ces lignes, le souvenir de cette tranquillité viendra s'inviter comme un baume bénéfique entre deux clients.¹⁶⁴

Being a compulsive jogger is also part of a coping mechanism which allows him to take stock. This activity is a time to reflect on the state of the world, the drastic changes in values that have occurred since long-gone May 1968 and the years that followed. As a matter of fact, he has already experienced the new work organisation and the strategies designed to progressively take out of the equation all forms of genuine solidarity between the workers in a perverse redistribution of tasks following job cuts: 'On dissolvait une équipe, on répartissait le boulot sur un autre groupe, eux,

¹⁶² Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 184.

¹⁶³ See Lemire, D. (2013) *Harcèlement textuel* (Canada: Editions Hurtubise).

¹⁶⁴ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 101.

solidaires de la débâcle des autres au début, finissaient par louer cette activité supplémentaire qui les sauvait.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, lethal disconnection syndromes keep killing anonymous colleagues other call centres. As the latter are turned into places of work where suicides seem unstoppable, irrepressible glimpses of humanity manage to surface in the sanitised environment: 'Dans la transparence des bulles de verre, chacun s'isole maintenant, perd son regard dans ces faux miroirs, cherche à se réchauffer en vain dans la blancheur froide des affichages plasma. La tragédie s'éparpille dans les pixels.'¹⁶⁶ Jumping out of the window in front of busy colleagues is indeed one of these suicides that make headlines.

Once again, a comparison can be drawn with the character Amélie. Her therapeutic habit of figuratively throwing herself from one of the bay windows of Yumimoto Corporation's skyscraper in order to escape from the pressure of the workplace, to let off a little steam and take a short break from her bullies, turns into an eternal break in *Retour aux mots sauvages*: death as a better prospect than having to take the next call. A sense of reassuring detachment can be applied to *Stupeur et tremblements* (Nothomb, 1999), given that the story takes place in faraway Tokyo where the workplace is defined by Toyotist norms mixed with ancestral hierarchical codes of conduct – an almost exotic system for an exotic place from a Westerner's point of view. Yet globalisation has since filled the gap and the sociocultural divergences between France and Japan are no longer antagonistic:

Retour brutal aux mots sauvages: se défenestrer. Le verbe, l'action, l'infinitif, le définitif, le mélange d'une terrible grammaire. [...] Comment en est-on arrivé là ? [...] Se défenestrer devant ses collègues. Pronom irréfléchi, prénom annihilé pour qui les mots ont disparu, reste le "devant ses collègues", marqués à tout jamais "devant". Comment vivre à nouveau ensemble, celui qui a vu hurler son voisin de bureau, celle qui a vu son responsable se précipiter trop tard, et sa main qui se referme, crispée sur le vide? Après, les mots n'ont plus d'importance. Aucune importance, le directeur qui parle taux de suicides et qui affirme que ce n'est pas pire qu'ailleurs, le ministre qui suppose que le climat social est finalement assez apaisé.¹⁶⁷

The managerial discourse focusing on the importance of tackling the wave of suicides through visits, training, compulsory meetings and coaching sessions leaves him very sceptical. The narrator considers that these initiatives are just part of a glossy and pseudo-humanistic PR campaign (see Section Two of Chapter One). Yet his lucidity remains intact when he assesses the so-called changes in work practice following the implementation of diversionary strategies to stop the trend of fatalities:

¹⁶⁵ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 282.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

On s'est réuni, on a voulu crever l'abcès une fois pour toutes, on veut passer à autre chose. Et à n'importe quel prix: alors, l'agitation prévaut, réunions, bilans, idées, suggestions. Il faut remettre de l'humain dans les rouages et l'humain coule comme une huile renouvelée. On a changé le bain de friture mais les requins restent les mêmes, capables toutefois d'adapter leur discours.¹⁶⁸

A sense of profound dichotomy persists, though, between his former profession as an electrician and his new role. This makes his current job even more alienating and harder to perform. Creeping precarity goes along with social regression. The increasing gap between the perception of what work used to be and what it really is nowadays is emphasised in a conversation he has with a former colleague:

Avec la réorganisation, tout avait été remanié et ceux comme lui, qui avaient acquis quelques titres de noblesse en intervenant sur les opérations délicates et les clients importants, avaient récupéré des tâches moins glorieuses. Un retour de vingt-trois ans en arrière, explique-t-il. Toute la formation aux techniques les plus pointues balayée d'un coup, devenue inutile. C'est maintenant qu'il y pense. A la douleur du deuil se substitue celle de la perte de ses compétences.¹⁶⁹

He is shocked to find it difficult to perform some basic electrical tasks which were second nature. Furthermore, whilst shaking hands with a garage mechanic, he suddenly realises that his own have been completely transformed and are now unrecognisable. They are Eric's hands but will eventually become the writers' hands. As Aurélie Loing, ex-worker in François Bon's *Daewoo*, puts it: 'Les mains ont la forme de ce qu'on leur fait faire.'¹⁷⁰ Also, a sense of raw nostalgia overwhelms him when in contact with the continuity of the dirty and messy space of the garage as the following passage demonstrates:

Ici, c'est toute une accumulation qui s'est produite au fil des ans, l'espace est devenu insécable, on y entre comme mécano et, tout de suite, l'atelier vous avale, vous prenez la couleur des murs, l'odeur de limaille de fer. On ne se contente pas de glisser sur la surface des clients, de leurs besoins, toute une rhétorique. Ici, la matière commande, la tôle, le plastique, le téflon, le carbone: il n'y a pas à négocier, convaincre, verser dans la fausse démocratie des relations commerciales. Ici, c'est la dictature de la matière.¹⁷¹

One can extrapolate 'the dictatorship of the matter' to an idealised and perhaps extinct proletariat, which is in frontal opposition to the new expression of fake and dreary democracy that confines the space of the call centres to that of today's process of all-out servicisation.¹⁷² The relationship between the pursuit of profit and collateral damage is underscored when, after coming across a list of the highest-paid CEOs, Eric decides to write an alternative one that includes all the names of those who have killed themselves. He pins it above his computer screen as a warning and an act of

¹⁶⁸ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 269.

¹⁷⁰ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁷¹ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁷² As observed by Danièle Linhart on page 15.

remembrance and somewhat morbid solidarity. Nonetheless, both he and his team mates are faced with the dilemma of whether to use the start of their midday break to participate in a minute of silence organised by the union out of respect for the latest employee who has committed suicide or to avoid having to queue for their lunch, which might make them late back to work. Like a shoal of fish, they unanimously opt for the second option, a decision with which the narrator struggles to come to terms:

Tout l'après-midi, il regrette son geste. Il n'aime pas le mot 'solidarité', tant dévoyé au profit de n'importe quelle cause, mais là, oui, il sent qu'il aurait fallu se rendre solidaire, en accord avec le choc qu'il a reçu, comme tous, à l'annonce de ce nouveau drame. Mais il a passé son chemin pour ne pas se désolidariser, justement, du reste de l'équipe.¹⁷³

Hope for a better tomorrow thanks to collective actions has been washed away for the time being. The main claim comes down to a single wish: getting at least a decent line manager. That is all that can be wished for in today's depoliticised workplace, as well as sticking to formal *vous* as a syntactic and minimal means of resistance, which guarantees a sense of protection and helps keep unnecessary troubles at bay:

Et on sait bien que le chef est du même monde, ses emmerdes, son divorce, ses épaules tombantes, son visage glabre et ses paupières lasses, les cartes postales qu'il n'envoie plus. Pas le mauvais bougre, alors il peut tutoyer. Mais la boîte qui a érigé le tutoiement en règle de convivialité, on n'en veut plus. Combien d'entre nous se sont fait poignarder dans le dos par un chefaillon, un collègue envieux, un directeur matamore, trop heureux d'utiliser la règle du tu pour jouer au copain. De cela, il ne veut plus et systématiquement il vouvoie maintenant.¹⁷⁴

Yet the operator never admits defeat. He goes against the grain when he breaks the rules and secretly visits a disabled customer after his working hours in order to help him solve a dispute regarding an unpaid bill. Interestingly, he acts with a kind of public service mindset and philosophy, the opposite of what he is paid to do, which can be linked to the abrupt overnight transformation enforced on France Télécom employees' job description as described by Ivan du Roy in *Orange Stressé*:

Le 31 décembre 1997, leur métier est de satisfaire les besoins des usagers, quel que soit le temps passé ou le coût de l'intervention s'il faut réparer une ligne ou installer (gratuitement) une prise téléphonique; le lendemain, 1^{er} janvier 1998, les personnes qui les appellent ne sont plus des usagers mais des clients, à qui il faut vendre, le plus vite possible, un produit, voire susciter un désir d'achat.¹⁷⁵

The regular visits progressively reconnect the protagonist with '*les mots sauvages*', those of a seasoned accomplished writer, in opposition to those he is

¹⁷³ Beinstingel, T. (2010) *Retour aux mots sauvages*, op. cit., p. 176.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁷⁵ Du Roy, I. (2009) *Orange stressé*, op. cit., p. 101.

forced to use at work.¹⁷⁶ These words play a fundamental role as they have the power to restore the balance between neo-liberal misery and alternative storytelling. They create room for re-emergent dialectics from which political correctness is systematically discarded. In line with other film-makers and writers, Beinstingel therefore 'confines to otherness the process of writing the task of symbolic deconstruction (and also ironical) which is necessary so as not to endure the dominant discourses. However, he has assigned himself the duty to report what Bourdieu used to identify as "*misère de position*, relative du point de vue de celui qui l'éprouve" [...], the "little" miseries thanks to which one can better comprehend the "great" misery of the world we live in.'¹⁷⁷ Such a lexicon gives meaning to millions of 'Eric's' struggling in the service sector and makes possible the emergence of a social dissidence. It suggests theories of liberation in the wake of the narrator's critical thinking and resilience, and maintains the likelihood of potential social struggles against 'corporate manslaughter'.

In this respect, a non-negligible number of writers blatantly laugh at the workplace through their textual avatars. Corinne Maier praises salutary laziness as an expression of resistance¹⁷⁸ in *Bonjour Paresse* whilst Alexandre des Isnards and Thomas Zuber settle scores with the gentle totalitarianism of new work organisations in *L'open space m'a tuer*. As for former top civil servant Zoé Shepard, she outlines harsh criticism of the management of the public sector in *Absolument dé-bor-dée!*¹⁷⁹ They use to various degrees derision, humour and irony to make a point regarding today's modes of production or absurdist bureaucracy. The reality of the workplace is drowned out by a succession of anecdotes which transcend their limited impact to become a process of self-emancipation, of a 'selfish' individuality. However the process does not stop there as the literary work that results from the experience gives way to a political breach that might transform reality. As Jameson writes:

¹⁷⁶ The protagonist meets his parents, visiting from the Algerian city of Sétif, who give him an awkward present: a tray under which is engraved 'Eric' by way of thanks. The gift gives the enforced fake name the recognition it deserves.

¹⁷⁷ Panella, C. (2015) '*La scrittura come pratica di resistenza: letteratura azienda e politica nei romanzi di Thierry Beinstingel*', *Between*, volume 10 [online] 30 November. [Translated from Italian] Available from: www.Between-journal.it [Accessed 28 July 2017].

¹⁷⁸ See Petit, C. (2004) 'Dans le monde de l'entreprise, pour vivre heureux, vivons planqués?', *La Libre Belgique* [online] 29 September. Available from: <http://www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/dans-le-monde-de-l-entreprise-pour-vivre-heureux-vivons-planques-51b885e1e4b0de6db9aae2ec> [Accessed 24 May 2016].

¹⁷⁹ Maier, C. (2004) *Bonjour Paresse*, op. cit.; Des Isnards, A. & Zuber, T. (2008) *L'open space m'a tuer*, op. cit.; Shepard, Z. (2010) *Absolument dé-bor-dée, ou le paradoxe du fonctionnaire* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel).

[...] rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal “solutions” to unresolvable social contradictions.¹⁸⁰

A strong sense of derision predominates either as a means of catharsis or as a platform to outline the absurdity of the place of work and hierarchical rules in Laurent Laurent’s *Six Mois au fond d’un bureau*.¹⁸¹ Echoing Georges Feydeau’s hilarious vaudevillian plays, the novel is a biographical account of the author’s own brief professional experience as a junior employee. It is a crude satire on the pettiness and lack of motivation that might characterise the place of work. Parodying any form of conflict and defining the PME¹⁸² as the place of the absurd with stereotyped characters, it champions one of the principal strategies used in resistance, that of *sabotage*. This is a French term that, as ‘Amélie-san’ notices in Nothomb’s novel, is used as it is in Japanese.¹⁸³ The protagonist behaves like a ‘social virus’ that keeps disrupting without her knowing the smooth running of Yumimoto.

In *Six Mois au fond d’un bureau*, the carefree and irreverent main character succeeds in infiltrating the company. His objective is to cause havoc and leave behind a heap of ruins. Yet as he has nothing to lose, deprived of any sense of political conviction, he decides to become the staff spokesperson given that a faint spirit of collectiveness persists among members. Indeed preposterous demands become real issues over which to fight and unite against the inaccessible top management. The text hints at a society plagued with endemic nihilism and apoliticism that keep short-circuiting the re-emergence of worthwhile social struggles whilst favouring petty squabbles. In this particular instance, the risk of burnout is replaced by that of ‘boreout’, characterised by workplace boredom and demotivation.¹⁸⁴ Thus the price to pay for social pacification is rather heavy as pseudo-conflicts emerge followed by pseudo-protests that eventually break out in their turn. A collective letter, listing miscellaneous claims and crystallising a sense of discontent bottled up for too long, is

¹⁸⁰ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁸¹ Laurent, L. (2001) *Six Mois au fond d’un bureau* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

¹⁸² *Petites et moyennes entreprises* (small businesses).

¹⁸³ Amélie’s only ally Mister Tenshi organises the *boycott* (an anthroponym of Irish origin also used as it is in numerous languages) of the gentlemen’s lavatories that she is forced to clean on a full-time basis. Moreover, such an extremely rare act of resistance only involves the male staff insofar as the possibility of a *girlcott* is not conceivable in Japan. (Nothomb: 1999, p. 143).

¹⁸⁴ Chabal, A. (2015) ‘Pire que le burn out, il y a le “bore out”, l’ennui au travail’, *Rue89* [online] 23 February. Available from: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-vie-de-bureau/20150219.RUE7945/pire-que-le-burn-out-il-y-a-le-bore-out-l-ennui-au-travail.html> [Accessed 15 March 2015].

to be sent to CEO Falstaff, whose name is akin to that of the buffoonish Shakespearian character with whom he shares certain traits such as vanity and uselessness.

“Monsieur,
[...] Si demain nous n’avons pas:
- mille francs chacun de plus par mois ;
- des armoires et des stages d’informatique ;
- la possibilité de prendre la voiture de service le week-end ;
- temps libre le lundi matin ;
- création d’un conseil de surveillance de la direction ;
- égalité des salaires ;
- la hiérarchie élue démocratiquement...
On vous casse la gueule !”
Signé : "Les Katangais du bureau"¹⁸⁵

Interestingly, the ‘Katangais’ were a security squad in charge of maintaining order during the occupation of The Sorbonne during the May 1968 revolt. The university’s Occupation Committee expelled the members of the squad whose extremist methods were considered unacceptable.¹⁸⁶ Yet, despite the exaggerated and improbable demands drafted in a blunt style, one may argue that some elements of this comical list are perfectly defensible. In the pacified workplaces of the ‘Republic of the Centre’ where social conquests have been theoretically won once and for all and therefore shelved, there should be no room left for demanding radical changes in terms of working conditions.¹⁸⁷ Like Anna Sam and others, the author has joined some sort of fragmented *néo-mouvement des établis* (see *L’Etabli* (Linhart: 1978) in Section One of this chapter) that does not give its name, does not have a name at all, nor any specific ideological reference. If a literature of infiltration, investigation and whistleblowing has replaced that inspired and supported by grand ideological motives, it remains inscribed in a political praxis by revealing and denouncing social injustice from within, e.g. journalist Jean-Baptiste Malet working as a temp in an Amazon warehouse.¹⁸⁸ Ironically, the book is also on sale on the Amazon website. For them all, writing therefore represents a lifeline as it establishes the centrality of individual resistance in opposition to that defined by a sense of collectiveness.

Anna Sam’s *Les Tribulations d’une caissière* typically illustrates this trend.¹⁸⁹ Praised for its carefree and quirky style, the bestseller denounces the arduousness

¹⁸⁵ Laurent, L. (2001) *Six Mois au fond d’un bureau*, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

¹⁸⁶ Named after mercenaries from Katanga (Congo).

¹⁸⁷ Furet, F., Julliard, J. & Rosanvallon, P. (1988) *La République du centre, la fin de l’exception française*, op. cit.

¹⁸⁸ Malet, J-B. (2013) *En Amazonie, Infiltré dans le “meilleur des mondes”* (Paris: Editions Fayard).

¹⁸⁹ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d’une caissière*, op. cit.

linked to the repetitiveness of the tasks performed by female cashiers as well as their ungratifying job. It has become an interprofessional manifesto for all low-paid employees. The day-to-day issues by which a solitary cashier is confronted shed light on Anna's working conditions and those of other cashiers but are also transferable to almost any other professional occupation in the service sector: telephone operators, security guards, sales assistants, cleaners and so on. All in all, they voice the grievances of an atomised and global class subjected to the same processes of collective control via taylorisation, toyotisation, job precarity and suffering (see Chapter One). A trivial situation such as the end of a shift during which each employee is expected to count their takings is revelatory of the way they are commonly treated and dehumanised by their line manager, as shown in the excerpt below:

- Alors, combien la 173? La 173! Oui, la 173, c'est vous!
- J'ai un nom!
- Oui, on sait mais c'est plus rapide comme ça. Alors, la 173?
- 3768, 65 euros!
- Recomptez, 173, vous avez fait une erreur! Je vous avais prévenue. Vous n'êtes pas assez concentrée.
- C'est une grosse erreur? Une petite? En moins? En plus?
- Je vous redemande seulement de recompter.¹⁹⁰

Institutionalised dehumanisation is therefore another means of keeping a tight control and making any attempt of constructive cooperation impossible. For comparison, and despite the blatant disparities between the cultural parameters involved, in Nothomb's *Stupeur et tremblements* the situation descends into farce when Amélie is asked by her line-manager to repeatedly photocopy the same batch of documents.¹⁹¹ In both situations, asking questions, making comments or defending a point of view is not tolerated. Orders coming from above do not need any justification and cannot be discussed, and yet they are questioned by both protagonists. Sam and Nothomb choose different shades of humour and irony to address the conditions of work encountered by cashiers for the former and a foreign interpreter for the latter.

Such literary processes also operate as a cathartic outlet, a last but salutary hope for both ex-employees who eventually turn into accomplished authors in order to escape from a life of exploitation. The pen here has replaced the camera by way of true resistance (see Section One of Chapter Two) in order to reveal, exorcise and fight exploitation. Under the narrator's ironic style and far beyond each specific

¹⁹⁰ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière*, op. cit., p. 126.

¹⁹¹ Nothomb, A. (1999) *Stupeur et tremblements*, op. cit., p. 34.

professional activity, a totalising reality of people stuck with their jobs emerges irrespective of cultural, sociological and geographical constraints. They are subjected to the financial and social strains that such situations lead to and are forced to increase their production rate. Sam's exhaustive Taylorist list of figures purposely set out in the chapter entitled *statistiquement vôtre* is revealing:

- 15-20 articles à enregistrer par minute. Cette moyenne peut passer à 45 chez certaines enseignes hard discount – la caissière est alors obligée de traiter les courses du client sans ménagement. [...]
 - 700 à 800 articles enregistrés par heure.
 - De 21 000 à 24 000 articles enregistrés par semaine.
 - 800 kilos d'articles soulevés par heure (la tonne horaire est dépassée les bonnes journées). [...]
 - 250 « Bonjour ».
 - 250 « AuRevoirBonneJournée » [in one word]
 - 500 « Merci »
 - 200 « Avez-vous la carte fidélité? » [...]
- Vous un robot? Mais non. Un robot ne sourit pas.
- 850 euros net: votre paie à la fin du mois.
 - 30 heures de travail par semaine (ou 26, 24, 20, mais rarement 35).¹⁹²

Moreover, cashiers have to be implicitly available on a full-time basis. In this instance, the issue is not about zero-hours contracts, given that the number of weekly hours is guaranteed – providing one complies with the rules – but how they are allocated from one week to the next: a significant element of commonplace precariousness whose issues are generally eclipsed by those of unemployment.¹⁹³ That situation is illustrated, not without a pinch of irony, by the author who sums up the reality of a majority of part-timers; again well beyond any specific professional category: *les travailleurs pauvres* (see Section One of Chapter One):

Je vous rassure tout de suite: pas la peine de chercher un autre emploi avec votre contrat à temps partiel. Votre direction vous réserve des plannings qui changent toutes les semaines. Heureusement, il vous reste la possibilité de faire des ménages de 5 heures à 8 heures du matin et du repassage à domicile.¹⁹⁴

Hence the insidious precariousness of the profession is reflected by the explosion of fractional contracts which tie each employee to their employer in a confused dependency, away from any comparative connectivity with fellow-employees.¹⁹⁵ That situation can turn into a real assault course, which again amplifies the precariousness

¹⁹² Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière*, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁹³ Goodley, S. (2013) 'Zero-hours figures to be reviewed by Office for National Statistics', *The Guardian* [online] 23 October. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/23/zero-hours-reviewed-office-statistics> [Accessed 04 December 2013].

¹⁹⁴ Sam, A. (2008) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière*, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

¹⁹⁵ See Paugam, S. (2007) *Le Salarié de la précarité. Les nouvelles formes de l'insertion professionnelle*, op. cit.

of statuses. It also underlines the shrinking of full-time positions in the French job market and the exponential increase of fractional and temporary contracts. The percentage of precarious jobs has jumped from 5.4% in 1983 to 13% in 2008, an estimation to which five million part-timers have to be added.¹⁹⁶ Fragmented timetables have also largely been made commonplace without taking into account the long-term impact on the employees' health or the effects on their standard of living. An analogy here is to be drawn between taylorisation and the disappearance of entire sections of tills as automation takes over in supermarkets. With automation, the synecdochical process of mutual assimilation between the individual and the machine they operate, in our case the cashier and the till, is completed yet to the detriment of the former. Mr Demarcy and his old workbench have had their day (Linhart, 1978: Section One).

In *Stupeur et tremblements* (Nothomb, 1999), comedy does not put into question the ancestral hierarchical Japanese model adapted to the corporate world. The latter will not budge in order to give the novel its significance insofar as the main character, Amélie, is persuaded that she is as much Japanese as European and is determined to prove it to her managers. Denouncing Toyotism and widespread bullying from a sociological perspective is not the writer's priority. In Anna Sam's novel, *a contrario*, the questioning of the absurdity of mass-market retailing rules and of cashiers' working conditions is essential to the text's political significance. As examined in Section Two of Chapter One, has the thin line between the 'computerised cashiers' and the 'computerised tills' been crossed through automation, causing neither a democratic reflection nor a murmur of protest? Could such a dire assessment be tackled with the lightness that is intrinsic to comedy? These writings prove otherwise by their very existence. Using comedy for pedagogical or at least informative purposes in order to tackle serious issues such as job precarity and exploitation is relevant insofar as comedy is by nature a 'friendly', engaging and popular and very accessible genre, as is the thriller. Both genres are effective vehicles to tackle serious issues. Reflecting on the unexpected impact of artistic production, Julian Stallabrass writes:

Art has two main advantages over mass culture in its bid to be entertaining: the first is that of surprise, since people generally do not expect art to entertain them [...] Cinema cannot display the

¹⁹⁶ In Demarcq, S. (2009) 'Emplois précaires: un système généralisé', *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* [online] 18 December. Available from: <http://www.npa2009.org/content/emplois-precaires-un-systeme-generalise-0> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

actual bisected corpse of a cow but it can noisily and effectively simulate the effects of an asteroid slamming into the Earth.¹⁹⁷

Although they are effective literary techniques, both humour and irony are also double-edged. On the one hand, they shed light on minor or major dysfunctions in the workplace as those turn out to be more meaningful to the readers. They represent a means of somewhat salutary resistance by an individual confronted with all sorts of pressures and have the power to boost catharsis. On the other, they advocate no alternative economic models and perhaps legitimise the hegemony of capital. The only remaining option is to find ways to accommodate the system by bearing an ambiguous paradigm between becoming a fully-fledged 'literary whistleblower' and a successful author at the same time.¹⁹⁸ Yet, considering the scale of such dominance, one cannot be selective in terms of ways to get at it. Every little attempt is worthwhile. Investigation and whistleblowing are therefore effective means of shaking the status quo, which could bring about changes. Whether these changes will occur or not, it is the readers' political responsibility insofar as the artists have already delivered. Moreover, informative awareness of the institutionalised exploitation that occurs in mass-market retailing is brought to a larger public whilst the author unavoidably makes business from it. To her credit, Sam worked as a cashier from 2000 to 2008 whilst taking a degree in literature. Interestingly, the blog she started and in which she shared her day-to-day experiences was followed by thousands of Internet surfers.¹⁹⁹

Yet a fundamental moral contradiction remains unsolved and some questions are to be raised: one cashier is liberated from the realm of everyday harshness but how about the hundreds of thousands of others? Have their working conditions improved since the publication of her novel, which was followed by a comic book,²⁰⁰ a stage play²⁰¹ and a cinematographic adaptation?²⁰² (Unfortunately, in the film, the fairy tale prevails by far to the detriment of the social issues, mainly focusing on the love story

¹⁹⁷ Stallabrass, J. (1999) *High Art Lite, British Art in the 1990s* (London & New York: Verso), p. 167.

¹⁹⁸ 300,000 copies of the novel were sold when published in 2008 and 87,844 tickets during the first week of the opening of the film.

¹⁹⁹ Anna Sam's blog *Les Tribulations d'une caissière*. 2013 [online] Available from: <http://caissierenofutur.over-blog.com/> [Accessed 14 December 2014].

²⁰⁰ Wol, Akita, M. & Akita J. (2009) *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (Toulon: Editions Soleil Productions/Collection Nomad).

²⁰¹ Gestes (groupe d'étude sur le travail et la souffrance au travail), 2015. *Les Tribulations d'Ana* [online] 13 January. Available from: <http://gestes.net/spectacle-sur-le-monde-du-travail-les-tribulations-dana-theatre/> [Accessed 30 July 2015].

²⁰² *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (2011) Directed by Pierre Rambaldi [Film]. France: Rezo Films.

between a middle-class customer and the main character.)²⁰³ The cashier paradigm has undoubtedly sparked a genre conducive to acts of resistance. In Louis-Julien Petit's comedy-drama film *Discount*,²⁰⁴ a group of cashiers subjected to the intensification of production from management that uses looming automation as a means of selection, retaliates by starting their own alternative supermarket. They steal products they are ordered to throw away and sell them at slashed prices to people on a low income and then share the subsequent profit between them, an initiative that shares some similarities with the Lip experiment touched upon in Section Two of Chapter One.

Since the development of capitalism, female workers have participated in social struggles throughout history even though they were deprived of civil and political rights.²⁰⁵ In *En découdre. Comment les ouvrières ont révolutionné le travail et la société*, Fanny Gallot observes that during the 1970s, strong collectives emerge in factories in order to fully participate in shaping the way daily activities are conducted. From the 1980s, female workers have been more discriminated against than their male counterparts as a consequence of the explosion in the number of low paid temporary jobs. For fear of losing their jobs, the young accelerate the pace of work, which creates a generational gap and weakens the solidarities established during the previous decade.²⁰⁶ Numerous examples of female working-class archetypes fighting exploitation can be found in this thesis, e.g. Louise and her fellow-workers in Gustave Kervern & Benoît Delépine's fiction film *Louise-Michel* (2010) in Section Two of Chapter Three and Sylvia and Géraldine in François Bon's work which we will now explore.

Different shades of resistance characterise François Bon's initial theatrical project, which brings together a group of female ex-workers with professional actresses in one of these now disused factories. Awarded le prix Wepler in 2004, *Daewoo*, a multi-genre novel, as he himself defines it,²⁰⁷ is based on a mixture of reported discussions with those ex-workers alternating with excerpts of theatrical scenes in which

²⁰³ Oury, A. (2011) 'Les Tribulations d'une caissière', *Critikat* [online] 13 December. Available from: <http://www.critikat.com/Les-Tribulations-d-une-caissiere.html> [Accessed 21 November 2013].

²⁰⁴ *Discount* (2014) Directed by Louis-Julien Petit [Film]. Germany: Wild Bunch Distribution.

²⁰⁵ In France, women obtained the right to vote in 1944, which was made law by the Provisional Government of Charles de Gaulle following their active participation in the Resistance.

²⁰⁶ See Gallot, F. (2015) *En découdre. Comment les ouvrières ont révolutionné le travail et la société* (Paris: Editions La Découverte).

²⁰⁷ Bourmeau, S. (2004) 'Entretien avec François Bon', *Les Inrockuptibles* [online interview] 27 August. Available from: <http://www.tierslivre.net/livres/DW/inrocks.html> [Accessed 01 August 2015].

characters reminisce about the radicalism of their struggles to keep the factories open, to which he adds his own reflections.²⁰⁸ The play was performed at the Festival d'Avignon in July of the same year. In the economically devastated Lorraine region, confessions from four former workers trying to keep their heads above the water and turned into full-time housewives result in a rather poignant piece of literature.

Even long after the factory gates have closed, the warehouses have been emptied and the machines dismantled or, in the case of Daewoo, transferred to Poland or Turkey between September 2002 and January 2003, laying off 1200 workers in the process,²⁰⁹ literary commitment still plays a significant part in transmitting the memory and stories attached to the local workforce. The text vividly exposes the conditions and deprivation of work. Thus, expressed in various forms, the same patterns of suffering, psycho-somatic symptoms and illnesses,²¹⁰ exploitation, fear of unemployment, all-out competition and institutionalised bullying are outlined and tackled at a diegetic level. Based on the author's authentic recordings of the female workers, *Daewoo* is a patchwork made from theatre, essay, journal or the novel. The nature and structure of the text remain intentionally kaleidoscopic, precisely to prevent any labelling. As Mahigan Lepage puts it: 'Il y a dans *Daewoo* un fond actif de diction, une poésie dense de l'usine close. A partir de ce fond, le roman construit tout un ensemble de machines fictionnelles qui œuvrent à fabriquer de l'illusion et de l'artifice.'²¹¹ If the separation between professional and private life is blurred, a process of interpenetration occurs between the workers' testimonies and the actresses. The scenes on stage amplify the authenticity of those lives only by restoring the workers' voice. The transmission of memories of defeated struggles makes their outcome less meaningless. Thus ambiguity in terms of genre identification remains at the core of Bon's project. To corroborate such an assertion from a different angle, it is worth drawing a parallel with Fredric Jameson's comparisons of genres and their different statuses:

²⁰⁸ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit.

²⁰⁹ *Le Monde* (2004) 'Etat des lieux des délocalisations en Juin 2004', *Le Monde* [online] 24 September. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/infographie/2004/09/24/etat-des-lieux-des-delocalisations-en-juin-2004_627992_3234.html [Accessed 01 August 2015].

²¹⁰ The link between recession, unemployment and the increase in cancers has been clearly established. In *Le Monde* (2016) 'Plus de 500 000 morts par cancer dans le monde associées à la crise de 2008', *Le Monde* [online] 26 May. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/sante/article/2016/05/26/plus-de-500-000-morts-par-cancer-dans-le-monde-associees-a-la-crise-de-2008_4926524_1651302.html [Accessed 26 May 2016].

²¹¹ Lepage, M. (2010) '*François Bon. La Fabrique du présent*' (Université du Québec à Montréal & Université de Poitiers), Chapter Four, p. 93.

From this perspective, the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life. Such a distinction reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and the private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic, between history, society and the “individual”, which – the tendential law of social life under capitalism – maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyses our thinking about time and change as surely as it alienates us from our speech itself.²¹²

From such a muddle, social reality undeniably prevails through unorthodox paths. What matters here is the social significance of the struggle and not the messenger who, in this particular instance, doesn't have to write in order to escape his own sociocultural *Entfremdung*.²¹³ It is faithfully raw and in synch with a region which has been bled white by its drastic deindustrialisation, leaving entire communities silenced and in a state of permanent trauma. The play is ‘une représentation dans une représentation, et cette double distance permet d'aménager, plus fondamentalement encore, les conditions d'un questionnement de la logique économique’.²¹⁴ How could there be a voice for victory if there is none for defeat? The reappropriation of the confiscated space is the breeding ground by which radical actions are made possible: ‘Une usine, c'est prévu pour tenir un siège: ils veulent pouvoir surveiller facilement. Alors, quand on bloque à notre tour, rien de plus facile.’²¹⁵

Bon's primary aim is to side with the defeated workers. He gives them a tailor-made testimony within which they can voice their concern. By making their plight visible to a potentially large audience, to future generations and to themselves, workers become their own spokesperson on stage and the subsequent distancing effect allows them to comprehend the social significance of the fight they have narrowly lost. Despite the social erasure, a sense of pride subsists through the intertwined confessions. Thus an on-going process of regenerative resistance and setbacks keeps emerging and disappearing in a continuous but also fragmented historical tempo:

Saraï: - Si on a eu le tort de s'arrêter en chemin, à qui le tort? Tous les journaux étaient là. Nous, ça ne les intéresse pas. Mais si tu mets le feu, si tu balances de l'acide dans la rivière, ou si tu coincés ton chef dans son bureau, alors tout d'un coup on existe. Moi, toute la nuit j'avais dit, maintenant qu'on l'a, on ne le lâche plus. Dans ton *Germinal*, ils ne faisaient ça qu'à un seul?²¹⁶

Nonetheless the grand narrative of left-wing ideals along with its cultural landmarks has been sidelined, an observation suggested by the fact that the strikers

²¹² Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 4.

²¹³ Alienation (translated from German).

²¹⁴ Florey, S. (2013) *L'engagement littéraire à l'ère néolibérale*, op. cit., p. 72.

²¹⁵ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit., p. 123.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

play Radio Energy in the background – a commercial station airing mainstream and somewhat apolitical songs which don't fit in with the occupation of the factory:

Les gars qui m'offraient ce matin-là un gobelet de mauvais café faisaient brûler les palettes de la grève, tandis qu'une mauvaise sono diffusait non pas les chansons militantes qu'on aurait entendues autrefois (Ferrat, Magny et les autres), mais Radio Energy.²¹⁷

The truth is that issues within the private sphere have taken precedence over collective struggles since the closedown. They are about unpaid bills, repetitive telephone calls to the banks in order to extend payment deadlines, pending memberships for kids' judo or dance clubs. Alongside evidence of a male-dominated bourgeoisie, a process of rehabilitation of a self-deprecating female working class clearly occurs:

Géraldine Roux, transcription brute (selon sa propre injonction):

C'est pourtant simple. Il y a ces mots qu'on vous présente comme ceux de l'évidence, de la raison, ces messieurs "les experts": des tonnes de mots. Et si on dit qu'il y aurait peut-être à raisonner autrement, c'est qu'on a rien compris, qu'on est larguées. Qu'on ne sait pas s'enlever du chemin. Une ouvrière, ça ne saurait que se lamenter. Ça ne sait pas lever les yeux vers les horizons du marché. [...] quelqu'un qui écrit sur les ouvriers, c'est la preuve que dans ce bas monde on a encore un peu de bon cœur. [...] Qu'est-ce qu'ils veulent, qu'on prenne des flingues?²¹⁸

Ex-worker Géraldine has made herself a guardian of records by cutting out every article in the press as well as meticulously filing her correspondence with politician Jean-Pierre Aubert, who acted as Government Industry Inspector at the time. The elites from the *grandes écoles*, institutes that guarantee their social reproduction, remain oblivious to any social reality that is not theirs. The jargon they use in order to water down their attacks on the labouring classes has nonetheless backfired. Turned self-taught philologist in her own right, she denounces the hackneyed language of the technocrats, to which is added a certain degree of patronising attitude towards the ordinary worker. She becomes a 'working-class whistleblower' in her own right:

[...] ce que j'ai trouvé: conférence de monsieur Jean-Pierre Aubert à l'Ecole des mines de Paris, septembre 2002. Thème: "l'ingénierie des restructurations". Ficher les gens dehors, c'est de la technique, de l'*ingénierie*. Titre précis: *Les mutations industrielles, vecteur de la modernisation publique*. Ah, vous dites qu'elle ne sait pas entendre, la vieille Géraldine? Notre chômage leur fait du bien. C'est dit en toutes lettres.²¹⁹

The suicide of co-worker Sylvia, a key player in the resistance against the closedown of the factories, haunts the women who alternately express their praise for and profound pain and regrets about their late colleague. The single mother made redundant with all the others and portrayed as a shy and self-deprecating person but

²¹⁷ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit., p. 81.

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

hailed for her combativeness, had the guts to challenge both the management and trade union representatives, therefore making enemies among both parties. Her self-inflicted death was one of profound guilt and introspection: ‘Les licenciements, comme si on en portait nous-mêmes la responsabilité, dit-elle: parce qu’on n’a pas su assez se battre, parce qu’on n’a pas fait ce qu’il fallait, comme il le fallait, parce qu’on n’a pas été assez fortes?’²²⁰ Notwithstanding the fact that her act could be considered proof of “class abdication”,²²¹ through her actions and speeches, Sylvia transfigured herself into the genuine representative of the team of female workers. Even though her death validates defeat, her resistance nevertheless symbolises a radical stance against the violence of the mechanisms of globalisation and of a union caged by its ideological consensual stances and infighting:

J’ai lu, et ce serait la seule page que je verrais jamais de Sylvia F.:

« *Non*. Résistance qui surgit en vous quelquefois avant même que votre esprit n’ait réussi à le justifier. Permanence du *non* intérieur que j’entends en moi, le socle même de ma personnalité. »²²²

Politics has hence receded from factories. This is not the result of fatalism but of a neo-liberal choice that has succeeded in marginalising and silencing alternative outcomes and which has the specific goal of preventing politics from re-appropriating those strategic places:

Peut-être qu’il faut ça, les mots des autres, pour qu’on sorte de soi-même, qu’on arrête de se dire que tout ça, c’est des lois hors du monde, des choses comme des nuages, la pluie et les orages. Les filles ont dû vous le dire: j’affichais ça sur le panneau libre expression [...]. Et je les collais sur le panneau de l’usine. Alors ils ont voulu tout arracher, sous prétexte que c’était le panneau des petites annonces et que j’en faisais une manifestation politique.²²³

Yet, class conflicts never rest. Not faraway from François Bon’s space of rehearsal, the occupation of the factory of American company Tenneco, which was part of the partially botched project to regenerate the region, is being organised by the workers to protest against the enforced new work organisation that deprives them of some fundamental social advances.

To close this section and building on the idea that the appeal of resistance is also central to literature, I will explore two novels by Gérard Mordillat who rehabilitates working-class heroes and anti-heroes’ militancy via ordinary workers. Akin to lengthy ‘political tracts’, these writings represent a somewhat cheesy tour de force in popular

²²⁰ Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit., p. 106.

²²¹ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 254.

²²² Bon, F. (2004) *Daewoo*, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

littérature du labeur. Entertaining and well-paced storylines have given the texts a widespread readership: 200,000 copies were initially sold for *Les Vivants et les Morts* and 160,000 for *Notre part des ténèbres*.²²⁴

All the same, *Les Vivants et les Morts*, followed by an adaptation of eight episodes for the small screen, tells with a certain panache of the political fights, setbacks, social tragedies and victories inextricably intertwined with the personal lives of a group of workers in a community in northern France, where the region's principal industry is under threat.²²⁵ One notices that the emblematic region has become a textual and filmic substrate for many writers and film directors following the continuous closing of factories since the 1980s. Akin to archaeologists, they excavate the remnants of the socio-economic significance of a foregone world in an attempt to make sense of the present.

The narration is organised around three prosaic characters: Rudi, a young and uncompromising CGT union representative convinced that unions cannot be believed in anymore as they are not up to the fight; ex-worker Lorquin, a respected local figure in his fifties who is among the first wave of redundancies and who, after being socially defeated, would take his own life; and finally Dallas, Rudi's wife, a young mother with two toddlers who shows exhilarating activism in her attempt to rescue the occupied factory and proves to be a fearless heroine when clashes with *les forces de l'ordre* occur. Either willingly or by default, the trio plays a crucial part in the organisation of the resistance among a myriad of other workers such as Lopez, a shrewd CGT mediator, not only fully aware of the hurdles and limits that negotiation implies but also adamant about speaking the truth regarding the impact of retaliation against elusive financiers and their subordinates. As for the bourgeois exploiters, they are unambiguously depicted as villains.

Throughout the story, radicalism represents the sole way out and redistributes the balance of power in the struggle between exploited and exploiters. Moreover, with the task of saving jobs comes the rehabilitation of leftist historical hermeneutics with its cohort of inspiring female figures who have profoundly transformed Western societies since the industrial revolution and with whom undaunted Dallas is reconnected and therefore transfigured, as the excerpt below outlines:

²²⁴ Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*; (2008) *Notre part des ténèbres*, (Paris: Editions Le Livre de Poche/Calmann-Lévy).

²²⁵ *Les Vivants et les Morts* (2010) Directed by Gérard Mordillat [TV Series]. France: Antenne 2 Télévision, Archipel 33.

L'écrivain moustachu l'a comparée [Dallas] à Louise Michel, Rosa Luxemburg, Berthie Albrecht et d'autres femmes dont elle n'avait jamais entendu le nom mais qui toutes s'étaient battues contre l'injustice. Celui à lunettes lui a parlé de la lutte des classes:
- Comme disait Brecht: 'Ceux qui ne participent pas à la bataille participent à la défaite.'
Ça lui a plu, elle s'en souviendra.²²⁶

Bertolt Brecht and other key figures of dissent and resistance are systematically unearthed to galvanise the return of class struggles whereas the media, and especially television with its biased coverage, are subjected to virulent criticism from the workers who dare to challenge the 'Language of the Fifth Republic' and the institutions and economic system that such a discourse serves and perpetrates (see Section Two of Chapter One). Interestingly, the presence of leftist clichés delivered with a punchy narrative style is less about tending to take the easy way out than about re-establishing an ideological balance in terms of fiction and realism. Such literary choices by the author therefore reignite the perception of a polarised society in which class struggles are ritualised and re-actualised with an unequivocal sense of gravity. Interviewed by *Télérama* on the TV adaptation of *Les Vivants et les Morts*, Xavier Mathieu, a CGT union representative from Continental remains adamant about the importance and the veracity of the story:

J'ai été bouleversé. Je pense que ce film va énormément toucher tous ceux qui ont vécu ce genre de situation et faire comprendre aux autres la détresse et le désarroi que peuvent ressentir des salariés brutalement privés de travail. La fermeture d'une boîte est quelque chose de très violent. Vous avez l'impression de tout perdre. C'est un deuil, un trou noir. Le film montre une histoire différente de celle des Contis, mais j'ai été troublé par son réalisme – tout sonne vrai, jusque dans les détails – et son humanisme. Je dis merci à Mordillat de l'avoir réalisé. C'est un grand hommage à la classe ouvrière et ils sont tellement rares à la télévision.²²⁷

A combination of determined, disciplined and uncorrupted workers, who nevertheless have to deal with their psychological burdens, weaknesses and faults (even magnificently succumbing to them at times), amplifies the legitimacy of their struggles. If a process of magnification based on mythological heroism sets the tone, it also goes hand in hand with trivial and petty deeds, bouts of treason and cowardice. All things considered, these stories speak of the human paradigm: ordinary workers who behave extraordinarily when crushed by shareholders and let down by the state that acts as a powerless puppet of globalised finance and tax havens. In *Le monde ouvrier dans les romans de Mordillat: la vie à court terme*, Natalia Leclerc observes:

²²⁶ Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*, op. cit., p. 811.

²²⁷ Milot, O. (2010) Xavier Mathieu: 'Dans "Les Vivants et les Morts", tout sonne vrai, jusque dans les détails', *Télérama* [online] 19 October. Available from: <http://television.telerama.fr/television/xavier-mathieu-dans-les-vivants-et-les-morts-tout-sonne-vrai-jusque-dans-les-details.61402.php> [Accessed 22 May 2017].

Tout en offrant une représentation mimétique de la société occidentale du début du XXI^e siècle, ces romans s'enrichissent ainsi d'un souffle épique revisité et tendu vers une vision utopique du réel. Les luttes sont ici menées par des héros d'un nouvel âge, affrontant le pouvoir d'un système économique et financier fondé sur l'urgence et la rentabilité. Ces héros sont "populaires" mais ils évoluent dans un univers qui est aussi celui du mythe.²²⁸

In this mythical realism, Rudi turning down a managerial position at such trying times sends a strong diegetic and non-diegetic message in terms of uncompromising solidarity and social belonging. His political purity turns him into the working-class hero that any novel worthy of its name nurtures to establish its perennality. He personifies the self-educated worker who uses his knowledge to challenge the internationalised *patronat*. He and his socially 'conscious' fellow-workers are not impressed by this fool's game and analyse accurately the ins and outs of what is at stake:

- Je vais te dire ce qui me gêne, dit Rudi, comme s'il soulevait un poids, c'est que j'ai l'impression qu'on est à la remorque de tout ce qui se passe. Ils veulent licencier: OK, on accepte qu'ils licencient. Ils veulent négocier: OK, on accepte qu'ils négocient. Ils veulent relancer l'activité, comme ils disent: OK, on accepte qu'ils relancent l'activité avec peut-être un tiers de personnel en moins. On est toujours à la traîne.²²⁹

The different union reps (CGT, FO and CFDT) are hampered by their ideological sectarianism and numerous divergences whilst finding themselves under pressure from an increasingly restless base. The fragmentation of these organisations reflects a sense of attrition inherent to the failure of social upheavals that have contributed to undermine and silence recent generations of workers. Moreover, divergences about which strategy to adopt open a rift between young Rudi and the older Lamy. The latter, a CFDT representative, opposes the French and the foreigners. Cornerstone of the National Front manifesto, the controversial issue of 'national preference' resurfaces as the only alternative to save jobs, which weakens class cohesion and undermines any potential uprising against the real would-be target: big business.

- On ne peut pas non plus laisser dire n'importe quoi, répond Rudi.
Il fait un geste en direction de Lamy:
- L'autre avec sa préférence...
Lamy le toise:
- Qu'est-ce que tu crois ? 'Ma préférence', comme tu dis, c'est la tienne.
- Tiens donc !
- Tu fais le beau, Rudi, tu te donnes des airs, mais imagine d'aller dire à ta femme: désolée, chérie, t'es virée, on a préféré garder Hachemi ou Mouloud qui sont depuis plus longtemps que toi dans la boîte ?
Et, ouvrant les mains en signe de paix:

²²⁸ Leclerc, N. (2012) 'Le monde ouvrier dans les romans de Gérard Mordillat: la vie à court terme', *Temporalités* [online] 13 December. Available from: <http://temporalites.revues.org/2307> [Accessed 27 July 2017].

²²⁹ Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*, op. cit., p. 142.

- Comprends-moi: j'ai rien contre eux. Ce sont même de bons copains.²³⁰

History repeats itself by settling the argument in favour of somewhat simplistic yet clear-cut far-right rhetoric in which a class let down by the mainstream parties that used to speak in its name cannot rely on anything better.²³¹ The dilemma lies between the tensions resulting from the acceptance of consultation and negotiation with the authorities and a total rejection of the logic of capital. Fighting their corner or increasing their struggle nationwide by giving it broader repercussions becomes a bone of contention among the workers. In today's workplace, even conflict has been privatised. Rudi's disregard for the inter-union procrastinations prompts him to organise drastic actions in a final attempt to save jobs. In the protagonist's own words:

- Pour que la fermeture se fasse en douceur, il va y avoir une négociation entre les syndicats, les pouvoirs publics et le médiateur qui servira à arrondir les angles. [...] Mais pour qu'une négociation soit équitable – T'es d'accord? – il faut qu'il y ait deux parties de forces égales, comme au bras de fer. Aujourd'hui, c'est pas le cas. On ne tire pas dans la même catégorie. Nous, on a rien, eux, ils ont tout: le temps, le fric, la loi... Alors j'ai pensé à un moyen de rétablir l'équilibre. [...] on a joué tout le répertoire qu'on connaît: grève, occupation, séquestration, manifestation, pétition et ron et ron petit patapon. Pour obtenir quoi? Rien: la porte. Alors moi je dis qu'il faut sortir du répertoire. En sortir vite et fort...²³²

The character is a shrewd tactician who operates as a catalyst for workers in similar social conflicts. His tenacity allows him to build bridges with neighbouring companies' workers so they can join the peaceful demo in which immigrants from the town council estates also participate. As Raymond Williams writes: 'But then, at the same time it is true that effective movement, anywhere, will assist every other struggle.'²³³ Though at the embryonic stage, the nationalisation of protest is on its way. His strategy proves to be successful as jubilation on one side is matched with fear on the other:

Mon urgence est de préserver la paix publique, répond le préfet, la main sur la poignée de la porte. Aujourd'hui, ils font venir des gens de Méneville, et pourquoi pas demain d'Henault, de Cithel, du Grand-Château-Bernard? Si nous n'arrêtons pas ça dans l'heure, qui nous dit que nous n'aurons pas à faire face à une véritable armée ouvrière?²³⁴

Oddly, the expression '*une véritable armée ouvrière*' sounds both like an unwelcome anachronism and a serious threat in the prefect's mouth. Despite multiple

²³⁰ Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*, op. cit., p. 114.

²³¹ See Alduy, C. (2015) 'Le FN est "une négation brutale de l'esprit critique"', *Le Monde* [online] 07 December. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/12/07/le-fn-vrai-parti-du-pret-a-penser_4826508_3232.html [Accessed 17 December 2016].

²³² Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*, op. cit., p. 583.

²³³ Williams, R. (1980) *Culture and Materialism*, op. cit., p. 254.

²³⁴ Mordillat, G. (2004) *Les Vivants et les Morts*, op. cit., pp. 699-700.

antagonisms, a rejuvenated and articulated discourse about class prevails, operating in a very confident fashion. It is expressed in the workers' lexicon but what is striking is that their opponents start to 'speak working class' by using the same lexicon. This symbolic linguistic victory may secure a social equivalent (see Section Two of Chapter One). Whether the end justifies the means, Rudi, his fellow-workers and the working class by extension revive and reconnect with past struggles that have contributed to shaping their identity, hence regaining a genuine sense of lost dignity and of ideological clarity insofar as, as Georg Lukács observes: 'The immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero's finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer, and that this glimpse is the only thing worth the commitment of an entire life, the only thing by which the struggle will have been justified.'²³⁵

Sharing the same verve in terms of style, class warfare and heroism, although with a more sensational plot-line, *Notre part des ténèbres* reconnects with a pre-1980s grand narrative that had shaped the labouring classes since Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* published in 1862.²³⁶ It tells the story of how newly redundant workers from a company which has been bought by a bigger consortium and outsourced to India, decide on a course of action in order to reverse the vicious cycle of looming poverty.²³⁷

This time around no factory occupation or strike action; instead a group of workers organise the kidnapping of members of the global elite that have gathered on an ocean liner on New Year's Eve.²³⁸ The regular flashbacks shed light on the birth of the blueprint and the different steps that lead to the concretisation of their plan through a very well-oiled and careful infiltration of the personnel in order to strike from the inside. If one considers the storyline to be somewhat far-fetched, the plot and the characters perfectly serve the committed viewpoint impregnated with a Dumasian

²³⁵ Lukács, G. (1971) *The Theory of the Novel, A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (London: The Merlin Press), p. 35.

²³⁶ 'Il y a l'émeute, et il y a l'insurrection; ce sont deux colères; l'une a tort, l'autre a droit. Dans les états démocratiques, les seuls fondés en justice, il arrive quelquefois que la fraction usurpe; alors le tout se lève, et la nécessaire revendication de son droit peut aller jusqu'à la prise d'armes. Dans toutes les questions qui ressortissent à la souveraineté collective, la guerre du tout contre la fraction est insurrection, l'attaque de la fraction contre le tout est émeute; [...]' (Hugo, V. (1862) *Les Misérables*, Livre Dixième, Chapitre 2. Livresse.com [online] Available from: <http://www.livresse.com/Livres-enligne/lesmiserables/041002.shtml> [Accessed 26 September 2015]).

²³⁷ Mordillat, G. (2008) *Notre part des ténèbres*, op. cit.

²³⁸ 'Burner of ships' in English, The *Nausicaa* is unashamedly renamed *Liberalism* by the indomitable group of workers.

touch of high adventure; an organised paramilitary counter-power, into which the symbolisms of the resistance movements of WW2 and more ambiguously those of terrorist cells organisation are integrated. The glorification of commando radicalism is the crux of the story and crosses genres and art forms. It is for instance central in Pierre Jolivet's social comedy *La très très grande entreprise* in which four friends decide to confront a chemical MNC whose industrial activities represent a threat to their environment and livelihood. They infiltrate its head office in order to seize compromising confidential documents to help their cause.²³⁹ Thus resorting to a bombastic style, so to speak, is the narrative ingredient that ideologically marked literature and cinema can provide and live with.

In the novel, a certain amount of psychologisation injected into the narration gives insight into the complex process of political activism. Motives for uniting and fighting against the market are far from monolithic and selfless and do not go without saying. Central character Gary, the mastermind of the mission, does not escape his own contradictions, making the siege of the liner an extremely vengeful personal case given that his own son committed suicide following a redundancy. Thus from personal revenge for some to dreams of revolution for others, what is at stake is an apologia for radicalism as the only path for bringing significant changes, given that dwelling on the past is not an option:

Pour ceux qui ont viré Milan, pour ceux qui nous ont vendus, pour tous ceux qui, tous les jours, ici et ailleurs, font subir le même sort à des centaines, peut-être à des milliers d'employés, d'ouvriers, de cadres... Nous sommes des ennemis payés. Voilà pourquoi ils veulent se débarrasser de nous. [...] Nous, les héritiers de toutes les luttes sociales qui nous ont précédés; nous, avec la certitude de notre valeur; nous, avec notre mémoire et notre savoir; nous, avec notre conscience politique; nous qui ne baissions ni les yeux ni les bras devant leur pouvoir, leur morgue, leur prétention. Nous sommes leurs ennemis, ils sont les nôtres.²⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the decision to allow the employees to evacuate whilst keeping on board the shareholders, the messy dénouement of the operation leads to the destruction of the boat, a metaphor for that of global capitalism. The Melvillian sinking is analogous to the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York and therefore bound to haunt the imagination, marking a turning point in history:

Il enjambe le garde-corps et s'apprête à plonger quand, brutalement, le Nausicaa se brise en deux par le centre. Les deux parties basculent en miroir. Deux pans de montagnes, dressées l'une face à l'autre, qui s'intimident et se défient. [...] Les deux tronçons du bateau s'enfoncent droit dans la mer à la vitesse irréaliste d'un rêve que le rêveur ne parvient pas à chasser de sa nuit.²⁴¹

²³⁹ *La très très grande entreprise* (2008) Directed by Pierre Jolivet [Film]. France: Pathé Production, France 2 Cinéma.

²⁴⁰ Mordillat, G. (2008) *Notre part des ténèbres*, op. cit., p. 409.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 603.

The strength of Mordillat's storytelling can be summed up in one simple reminder of forgotten but rather obvious truths: the working class thinks; and thinking is a contagious, even exponential process. The working class knows how to act and fight. Workers are proud and aware of their own sense of regained identity on the historical scene and won't let it go. His weakness is that he risks preaching to the converted and that the divisions of labour are solely a means to make the readers' escapism juicier, which would amount to saying that he writes for the dominant culture by default. Hence Mordillat himself defines literature as 'un défouloir d'after-work',²⁴² which is not incompatible with rehabilitating class struggle as an imperative storyline peppered with commando radicalism and re-internationalisation.

Can such a literary success only be explained by the depiction of daring characters who have the backbone to fight against the supposedly invincible forces of the market? Like other writers and film-makers explored in this thesis, Mordillat dramatises class struggle by elevating his protagonists into complex and inspiring working-class archetypes. Yet the lucrative success of fictional works either praising, challenging or protesting against the market can also come down to straightforward escapism and a nostalgic representation of the working-class everyman.

Even though one may argue that he tries too hard to reinstate past glory, his accessible creations succeed in bringing about a refreshing and forceful political consciousness adapted to 21st-century social issues with a clear sense of mass entertainment. His stories, and those explored throughout this thesis, raise two fundamental questions: could workplace literature and film be the focal point where social dissent regains enough momentum to leave the comfort zone of its current marginal status, acting like dialectical vehicles for fresh ideas, hope and class transmission? Or, could these art forms just be mere artifices for consumption at minimal cost in order to achieve a cathartic revenge on neo-liberalism through its own profiteers? The best answer may lie somewhere in between.

²⁴² Caviglioli, D. (2010) 'Voici le roman d'entreprise', *Le Nouvel Observateur* [online] 01 September. Available from: <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20100901.BIB5544/voici-le-roman-d-039-entreprise.html> [Accessed 05 May 2017].

Conclusion of Chapter Four

As has been shown in this final chapter, acts of resistance within characterisation and workplace stories contribute to identify *littérature du labeur* as an evolving artform with a wider social significance. In certain novels, there is a sense of the poetic justice of time, of satisfaction and jubilation about the protagonists' decline and final disappearance as they are vanquished by their hubristic nemesis. Bardeilhan, Tourneuillerie, Rorty and Guyot personify neo-liberalism and have in common a tragic outcome, either by dying prematurely or being turned into powerless commodities. Thus, in the writings examined, these characters' swift corporate rise remains ephemeral.

Akin to the illusory power of the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*,²⁴³ their abrupt fall reminds the reader of the frailty, the deceitfulness and the finitude of powerful rulers as well as the intrinsic impermanence of the systems they serve. They end up narratively defeated, as class representatives of a doomed ideology marred by insurmountable contradictions. On the other hand, there are those who are bound to typify a spirit of resistance, e.g. le cœur, Eric, Géraldine, Sylvia, Dallas, Rudi and Gary who start their transformative journey defeated by corporate bodies. Yet they show initiative through grassroots resilience and resistance respectively; therefore re-engaging with a new praxis in terms of political perspectives despite the experience of setbacks. These heteroclitite and iconic characters share a collective destiny by personifying a 'social totality'.²⁴⁴ It is essential for their credibility that words and deeds go hand in hand regardless. With the conspicuous exception of dystopian fictions examined in Section Three, they emerge from 'defeated' to 'nearly victorious', yet with an "'historical operativity" [which] remains to be derived'.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) Directed by Victor Fleming [Film]. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

²⁴⁴ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 259.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Conclusion

By narrowing down the focus to a workplace perspective, this thesis has shown that assessing the effects of globalisation can be apprehended with a reactivated conception of modes of production and class despite a workforce overwhelmed by neo-liberal representations and a lack of convincing alternatives. Chapter One has set out to explore the erosion of social rights that manifests itself in workplaces, the focal point of the balance of class power. The evidence presented has shown that forms of control that deprive the workforce of any entitlement in relation to their profession have gradually become hegemonic. As respectively outlined in the two sections, the following significant factors have emerged since the 1980s. Firstly, the degradation of work and of the image and status of the worker has been accentuated with the explosion of the tertiary sector. Secondly, the communication utilised by companies has been reduced to a monofunctional role, which says absolutely nothing about them, with the exception of being a semantic screen for self-preservation. Thirdly, the emergence of insidious and atomised forms of bullying have changed workplace relationships by developing a culture of fear within organisations as a result of the weakening old solidarities. As sociologist Jean-Pierre Durand rightly states: ‘[...] il s’agit d’analyser pourquoi l’on constate l’absence de révolte durable contre l’ordre établi par l’inégalité du rapport salarial, contre l’imposition de règles contraignantes, et surtout contre les cadences lourdes, contre un travail répétitif et monotone, etc.’¹

The subsequent three chapters have in common a social significance that has emerged from different genres; from workplace stories of documentaries, the narrative forces of fiction films and writings which offer reflective and viable outlooks that are more than ‘a utopian compensation for everything lost in the process of the development of capitalism’.² In this instance, contemporary French cinema and literature have effectively tackled the consequences of globalisation by bringing to the fore the powerlessness of the suffering, atomised and invisible employee who is confronted by manipulative and intrusive managerial control within a generally negative employment context, deunionisation, unfettered competition and political

¹ Durand, J-P. (2004) *La chaîne invisible, Travailler aujourd’hui: flux tendu et servitude volontaire*, op. cit., p. 277.

² Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 225.

disengagement. In retrospect, it has become evident that these chapters form a whole therefore I shall now address them together.

By also focusing on subdued or overt forms of resistance in opposition to the contentious language of managerial control and institutionalised bullying, these art forms have expanded a praxis of critique encompassed with promising results. Their stories have provided pedagogy in order to incite ways of resisting via an approach that privileges infiltration, investigation and whistleblowing through alternative voices in situations wherein resistance appears to be the least conceivable option or is simply out of the equation. Thus, via a different approach, a strong sense of circumspection and pragmatism in terms of renewed political commitment within the place of work prevails over defeatism. From extensive testimonies about unfair treatments to inspiring strategies for overcoming them, workplace disputes and their outcomes are exposed and magnified. They have brought back the language of the unheard, renewed and adapted for the 21st century. They convey the protean form and unpredictable nature of resistance as encapsulated by Michel Foucault. He writes:

Elles [les résistances] sont donc, elles aussi, distribuées de façon irrégulière: les points, les nœuds, les foyers de résistance sont disséminés avec plus ou moins de densité dans le temps et l'espace, dressant parfois des groupes ou des individus de manière définitive, allumant certains points du corps, certains moments de la vie, certains types de comportement.³

Furthermore, not only have these films and writings captivated a large audience and readership, but some have also exercised a tangible influence on specific aspects of society by outlining concrete perspectives and subsequent changes beyond the realm of their artistic form, e.g. Anna Sam's *Les Tribulations d'une caissière* (2008) explored in Section Four of Chapter Four. These inspiring works have shown a capability to reach beyond the art-house circuit by exposing that the fragmentation of exploitation, which is imbricated in that of class, has two perverse effects. Firstly, it dulls its perception and secondly, it complicates attempts and strategies to fight back. The importance of these stories also manifests itself by encouraging diversity in terms of social responses and by setting defences without necessarily taking 'refuge in the often self-congratulatory world of puritan activism'.⁴ Though 'puritan activism' is still a worthwhile subject for inspiring storylines, e.g. notably in Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines* (1999) in Section One of Chapter Three. It has the power to

³ Foucault, M. (1976) *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Editions Gallimard), p. 127.

⁴ Bland, B. (2016) 'Only The Left Loses If Corbyn Retains Control Of Labour', *The Huffington Post* [online] 20 July. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/benjamin-bland/jeremy-corbyn/labour_b_11072948.html?utm_hp_ref=uk [Accessed 20 May 2017].

influence social outcome alongside other frameworks, e.g. the emergence and dissemination of *Nuit debout* as explored in Section Three of Chapter Two.

Akin to numerous texts examined in Section Three of Chapter Four, e.g. Philippe Claudel's *L'Enquête* (2010), this project commenced with a pessimistic perspective in synch with the abdication of politics by the labouring classes against the backdrop of globalisation, yet gradually challenged the irreversibility of the latter given that, to quote Enzo Traverso, '[u]n monde sans utopie, c'est un monde tourné vers le passé.'⁵ The successive climb-downs of the French mainstream left since the 1980s, which is perfectly fictionalised in François Salvaing's *La Boîte* (2001) in Section Two of Chapter Four, and the propensity to consider and present modes of production and class outmoded interpretations unable to tackle current social tensions have resulted in a vacuum filled with identity-related issues whilst those linked to class are sidelined. However, in my view, identitarian closure and community ghettoisation are amongst the consequences of the fragmentation of class identity and not the other way around. Such issues are touched on in Jean-Pierre Lilienfeld's *La Journée de la jupe* (2009) and to a certain extent in Michael Haneke's *Le Temps du loup* (2002) in Section Two of Chapter Three.

As I have also emphasised throughout this exploration, thanks to film-makers and writers committed to expose 'little' miseries, control and to make sense of 'little' resistance(s), reality and fiction show the capacity to coincide and nourish each other in a perpetual flow between writings, 'straight' documentaries and fiction films. As a matter of fact, I have also highlighted that fact-based documentaries can be biased as one can always be selective with the material they deal with and how this material is shown, which may represent a filmic imposture however necessary insofar as there can be a thin line between fictions inspired by or based on real events and 'straight' documentaries. As Pierre Maillot states:

L'auteur-réalisateur de documentaire, pour sa part, ne veut pas être crédible, il veut être compris. Plaire est secondaire. L'objet du documentaire est d'informer, donner à penser, et même convaincre. Si la fiction cherche la connivence avec le spectateur, le documentaire lui demande sa confiance. Tout le problème est d'établir la confiance, de la gagner, car elle n'est pas acquise d'avance, et elle est d'autant plus difficile à acquérir qu'il s'agit de réalité.⁶

⁵ B, J-M. (2017) 'Histoire, mémoire et utopie. Entretien avec Enzo Traverso', *Mediapart* [online] 14 June. Available from: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-marc-b/blog/060617/histoire-memoire-et-utopie-entretien-avec-enzo-traverso> [Accessed 20 July 2017].

⁶ Maillot, P. (2012) '*L'écriture cinématographique de la sociologie filmique. Comment penser en sociologue avec une caméra?*', *La nouvelle revue du travail* [online] 10 December. Available from: <https://nrt.revues.org/363> [Accessed 04 September 2017] op. cit.

Despite indisputable differences in terms of genre, aesthetic and narrative, all these stories step into line to address unequivocally the social significance of workplace issues *du travail* with force and conviction. In this respect, Jameson observes that ‘if interpretation in terms of expressive causality or of allegorical master narratives remains a constant temptation, this is because such master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them [...]’.⁷ On that basis, my goal has been to provide an interpretative exploration in order to identify the emergence of a possible class-inscribed awareness that needs to be brought back to visibility.

Thus, most of the real-life or fictional employees encountered are scarcely aware that their workplace shortcomings are first and foremost the consequence of a collective one that took place elsewhere in a different era – and the reader or viewer may not be either. (In the majority of the explored documentary films, for instance, the missing link is simply overlooked, which may divert from the bigger picture despite the fact that the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’ keeps lingering on.) Whether a cinema and a literature *du lanceur d’alerte*, *du refoulé* or *de la démondialisation* have been identified, in substance, I have posited that the writer and director’s role should be to not neglect this missing link, a vital endeavour that might release ‘the material force of the idea’⁸ and inspires acts of resistance through cultural and political transmission.

As a matter of fact, some archetypal characters or real-life individuals essentially preserve and perpetrate the neo-liberal project and propensity for control; others find ways to turn the tide by fighting back and regaining territories considered lost. Either with resentment or admiration, it is therefore up to the reader or viewer to consider them villains or role models. In this respect, many film-makers and writers excel at creating archetypal middle-class executives who, driven by an awkward sense of ideological devotion, are nonetheless unable ‘to live up to the neo-liberal expectations of competitiveness and profitability’.⁹ Most of these protagonists are therefore overtaken by events and cannot ultimately reverse the destructive socio-economic upheavals they have condoned, endorsed and/or masterminded. Not quite innocent in

⁷ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 19.

⁸ Raymond Williams quoting philosopher Rudolf Bahro in the conclusion of *Beyond Actually Existing Socialism*, in *Culture and Materialism*, (1980) op. cit., p. 273.

⁹ Koehane, K. (2016) *The Social Pathology in Contemporary Civilisations* (London: Routledge), pp. 185-188.

their actions, whether consciously or not, most of them experience and implement toyotisation to its worst effects. Their visceral reformism barely conceals the crucial importance of the modes of production they are determined to alter by promoting a so-called cultural revolution within the company subjugated by ‘the global forces of the market’.

Last but not least, the evidence presented has shown that the risk *du look* remains high. Reinforcing a process of psychologisation that might strengthen a dehistoricised perception of the stories unveiled and their characters has indeed the potential to distract and therefore undermine the *du labeur* project. Such a derivative process overshadows the socio-economic issues by giving way to romanticised, even clichéd interpretations and representations based for instance on the self-made man apolitical paradigm, which re-emerges swiftly when the distinction between exploiters and exploited is gradually eroded by the stranglehold of the former on narratives.¹⁰ This is the reason why I have used *cinéma du look* and the ‘heritage film’ as counterpoints in the introduction of Chapter Three. Nonetheless, some of the works analysed in this thesis also validate the possibility that elements *du look* are astutely integrated into *du labeur* to address social issues in a more accessible and appealing manner, e.g. Eric Guirado’s *Le Fils de l’épicier* (2007) in Section One of Chapter Three.

Thus, both genres can nourish each other or simply co-exist in a harmonious indifference among art forms. If Fredric Jameson states in *The Political Unconscious* that, ‘[i]t is in detecting the traces of an interrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity,’¹¹ it is worth noting that the publications and films are valuable precisely with regard to their own specific ‘political conscious’. In other words, their rationale and political commitment sit on the borderline of what a theory of the ‘political conscious’ would reveal. They are ripe to burst into some sort of radical comeback of historicised individuals whose determination is to question and confront the current social order that globalisation and its evasive representations have marketed, naturalised but certainly not silenced.

Interestingly, the first affected by this process of realisation are in many cases the artists themselves. Based on their own testimonies, one notices that the writers and

¹⁰ See Salmon, C. (2007) *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, op. cit.

¹¹ Jameson, F. (1983) *The Political Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 4.

film-makers become aware in hindsight of the political and militant dimension of their works, e.g. Fabrice Cazeneuve's own assessment on his film *De gré ou de force* (1998) in Section Three of Chapter Three. As this realisation is triggered in many instances by the positive reception from readers and viewers, one can speculate that during the different phases of the creative process,¹² the true significance of the work remains contained within the fragment of the artist's focus. It is only afterwards, once the fragment is completed, that the totality is revealed in terms of politics. This political and militant big bang (perhaps a spark) can only be initiated when the artform is let loose by the artist. In this respect, I will end with an inspiring reflection by Herbert Marcuse on the subject of defeat versus victory. Both share a same grey and salutary area within which the power of artistic interpretation lies and above all prospers. He writes:

Are there, can there be, authentic works in which the Antigones finally destroy the Creons, in which the peasants defeat the princes, in which love is stronger than death? This reverse in history is a regulative idea in art, in the loyalty sustained (until death) to the vision of a better world, a vision which remains true even in defeat.¹³

The market may have won, yet the fight against such a victory has somehow never ceased getting stronger. Positing that the battle for control remains uncertain with no epilogue in sight, the admission and analysis of the defeat, the cathartic process of recovery and preservation via stories outlining individual and collective strategies and action are the worthwhile elements that might continue to inspire *cinéma* and *littérature du travail* in the years to come.

¹² See Petty, G. (1997) *How to be better at... creativity* (London: Kogan Page). The author divides the creative process in six phases (inspiration, clarification, evaluation, distillation, incubation and perspiration). According to his theory, the separation between them is permeable and the phases can be experienced in a different order and more than once.

¹³ Marcuse, H. (1978) *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press Book), pp. 46-47.

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Acronyms and abbreviations in alphabetic order

French

ANDRH: Association Nationale des Directeurs des Ressources Humaines
CAC 40: Cotation Assistée en Continu
CDD: contrat à durée déterminée
CDI: contrat à durée indéterminée
CFDT: Confédération française démocratique du travail
CFTC: Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens
CGT: Confédération générale du travail
CPME: Confédération des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises.
CNPF: Conseil national du patronat français
CPE: contrat première embauche *or* contrat précarité extrême
CRS: Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité
DRH: directeur des ressources humaines
EELV: Europe Ecologie Les Verts
ENA: Ecole nationale d'administration
FN: Front national (renamed RN (Rassemblement national) since June 2018)
Fnac: Fédération nationale d'achats des cadres
FO: Force Ouvrière
GDF: Gaz de France
HMS: Harcèlement Moral Stop
IAB: Institut de recherche pour le marché du travail et les professions (Germany)
INSEE: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques

LQR: *Lingua Quintae Respublicae* (langue de la Ve République)
 LR: Les Républicains
 LTI: *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (langue du IIIe Reich)
 LVMH: Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy
 Medef: Mouvement des entreprises de France (formerly known as CNPF (Conseil national du patronat français))
 Méthode des cinq S du toyotisme: *Seiri* (débaras), *Seiton* (rangement), *Seiso* (nettoyage), *Seiketsu* (ordre), *Shitsuke* (rigueur)
 MLF: Mouvement de libération des femmes
 NEI: nouvelle économie individuelle
 OPA: offre publique d'achat
 ORTF: Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française
 OS: ouvrier spécialisé
 PDG: président directeur général
 P-A-M-P-A: Personnalisation. Adaptation. Mobilisation. Partage. Anticipation.
 PME: Petite et moyenne entreprise
 PS: parti socialiste
 PSE: plan(s) de sauvegarde de l'emploi
 RH: ressources humaines
 RMI: revenu minimum d'insertion (renamed RSA (revenu de solidarité active) since 2010)
 RTT: réduction du temps de travail
 SBAM: sourire bonjour au revoir merci *or* sans borne automatique merci
 SDF: sans domicile fixe
 SNES: Syndicat National des Enseignements du Second degré
 TMS: troubles musculo-squelettiques

English

AWOL: absent without leave
 CEO: Chief Executive Officer
 HR: Human Resources
 IMF: International Monetary Fund
 MNC: multinational corporation *or* company
 OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
 RSI: Repetitive Strain Injury
 The Five S principles of Toyotism: *Seiri* (sort), *Seiton* (set in order), *Seiso* (shine), *Seiketsu* (standardize), *Shitsuke* (sustain)
 TPS: Toyota Production System
 WW2: World War Two